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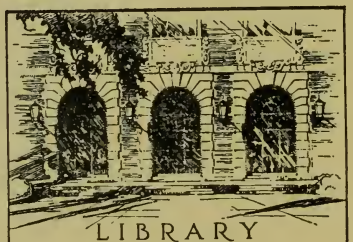

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SIR FRANCIS CLEARING THE BROOK.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

BY

"SCRUTATOR,"

AUTHOR OF

"THE SQUIRE OF BEECHWOOD."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE

EARL OF STAMFORD & WARRINGTON,

&c., &c.

My dear Lord,

By the following Tale, in which the characters are depicted from real life, I have endeavoured to show that Foxhunters are not men of one idea only, or of one pursuit; and that Masters of Foxhounds do not, as they have been grossly misrepresented, *live for Foxhunting alone*. As an exemplification of the contrary being the fact, I could adduce numerous instances; but need go no further than point to your Lordship, now occupying the first position in the hunting world, as Master of the Quorn Country, and may affirm, without flattery, that the encomium bestowed on your great predecessor, the celebrated Hugo

Meynell, may with equal truth be applied to yourself: — "He was, indeed, as much the *répandu* of the *élite* of Grosvenor Square—as much at home at St. James's—as he was at Quorndon or at Ashby pastures." However bold and adventurous in the field, Foxhunters of the present day, like the knights of old, are distinguished for their chivalrous devotion to the fair sex, fully appreciating the *agréments* of polished society, with due attention to the other duties of social life; of which the sceptic may be satisfied, who will follow the gay Meltonian from the field to the fireside, when

ἅμα ταῖς πανοπλίαις θρασυκάρδιαν ἀγρευτὴρ ἐκδύεται.

In the hope that your Lordship may not consider your kind patronage ill conferred on this unpretending work,

I have the honor to remain,

Very faithfully yours,

THE AUTHOR.

THE

MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

CHAPTER I.

It was on the morning of the first of November 18— (the fox-hunter's opening day for the season), that a gay party of sportsmen, in their bright scarlet costume, were gathered round the breakfast table of Mr. Beauchamp, of Bampton House; a gentleman of high descent, and large landed property, in one of the midland counties. Bampton House being of large dimensions, many friends were invited the previous evening to dine and sleep there, in readiness for the ensuing gala day; accordingly about half-past

nine on that auspicious morning, (for so it proved, although not exactly with "a southerly wind and a cloudy sky") a goodly assemblage of choice and daring spirits thronged the hospitable board of Mr. Beauchamp, all eager to dispatch their morning meal, and prepare themselves for the coming fray.

On the sideboard, besides the usual dishes, on such occasions, of ham, beef, cold fowls, game, &c., divers bottles of cherry brandy, Curasçoa, and Maraschino, stood invitingly displayed.

Of this goodly company, whilst so engaged, we may take this opportunity of noticing a few of the most distinguished characters; and first of all, as standing by fox-hunting etiquette at the head of his brothers in pink, the Master of the Hounds, William Beauchamp, now in his twenty-fourth year, (living with his father), to whom the management of the pack was now entrusted. He was tall in stature, though rather slightly formed, yet of great activity and strength, and a fearless though careful rider. He possessed a frank and manly countenance, by many

called handsome, with a fine curly head of dark hair, which, of course, in the eyes of the fair sex passed for something; and withal, not to dwell too long on a description of his personal or mental qualities, he was a general favourite with all classes, high and low, rich and poor; and to his decided popularity the cause of fox-hunting in that district was undoubtedly indebted for its progressive influence.

Although young to occupy the position of master of fox-hounds, he had been brought up from boyhood to the profession, and initiated by his father into the mysteries of the noble science, which, truth to say, proved a far more attractive study than Latin or Greek; and yet William Beauchamp had made such progress in the dead languages at the university, that he took his degree with flying colours, and, as his friend Bob Conyers used to affirm, he would have been in the first flight, but for a prolonged liver attack, which at last became so serious, that he was recommended by his doctor and tutor also to give up reading, and take again to the saddle;

" and a deuced good change, too," said Bob, " or there had been a capital fellow spoilt."

Mr. Beauchamp, the father, was one of the old school,—cheerful, generous, kind-hearted, and much given to hospitality. In personal appearance he was about the middle height, well formed, and of a fresh complexion; he had been one of the handsomest men of his time, but when this tale commences, having nearly reached the age of man, he had become less elegant in form, and feeling his years, handed over all authority in the hunting establishment to his only son, between whom and his father the most affectionate cordiality existed, proceeding from a similarity of disposition and pursuits. One daughter, Constance, a pretty girl of nineteen, completed the family circle, Mrs. Beauchamp having been dead some years.

Constance, although highly accomplished in arts and sciences feminine, was a superior horsewoman, possessing, with a beautiful seat and hand on horseback, nerve sufficient to mount and manage the most refractory animal of the

genus equine. Her figure, rather under than over the general standard of women, was cast in Nature's most perfect mould; her features regular, and of the Grecian order, with a profusion of dark, glossy hair, and finely-arched eyebrows. In society she was rather reserved, although of deep and affectionate feelings; but with her friends and relations joyous and communicative. Utterly devoid of affectation, she was generally beloved by her neighbours, and the most particular pet of her father and brother, as well as of Bob Conyers, to whom I must next introduce my readers.

Bob (as he was usually called) was a bachelor, aged about forty, tall, stout, of a merry countenance and goodly mien, passionately devoted to his favourite amusement of fox-hunting; and it may suffice to say of the individual man, that he had the *entrée* of nearly every gentleman's house in the county, in which he was ever greeted with a most welcome reception from the seniors, and with rapturous glee by the junior members of the numerous families; in short,

no dinner party was considered quite complete without the presence of this highly-favoured son of Nimrod. He was also greatly patronised by the ladies, having a good voice and tolerable ear for music, being also a graceful dancer and cheerful partner in a ball-room; and in lack of other occupation during the *dead* months, that is (in Bob's vocabulary) the summer season, he was occasionally seen patiently sitting down at a lady's work-table, with a piece of worsted-work in hand! Bob possessed a most versatile genius. He could discuss politics with the Members of Parliament, quote Latin and Greek with the scholar, divinity with the clergyman, small talk with the young ladies; and drink tea and play cards with the old ones. Shakespeare, Byron, and Moore, his favourite poets, were ready at his beck and call;—yet he was a first-rate sportsman and rider notwithstanding, a capital shot, good cricketer and billiard player, a formidable opponent with the gloves, and perfect master of the broad-sword exercise. With these and a few other accomplishments and embellishments of

mind and person, it was a matter of wonder to all his friends that Bob remained still in single blessedness, particularly as his penchant for women and children was so notorious. But the secret lay here ;—Bob was too poor and considerate to marry any woman without money, and too proud to marry any one with.

Opposite to Bob at the breakfast table (and opposite to him in almost every particular), sat Richard Vernon, the eldest son of Mr. Vernon of Leighton Hall, the nearest neighbour, although not the most agreeable one, to Mr. Beauchamp. Richard, although at school and college with his son, was the reverse of William in disposition and feelings ; and the two young men, although from early acquaintance long and intimately known to each other, could never be considered friends. Richard was a man of the world, gay and dissipated; insinuating in manners, agreeable in conversation, and strikingly handsome. Although professing to be a fox-hunter, he failed in the essentials of spirit and nerve for the pursuit; but fox-hunting being the fashion

during the winter months, when time hung very heavily on his hands, he was perforce obliged to mount the bit of pink cloth in self-defence. Yet he had been overheard to say, "he never could see any fun in risking his neck (which, by the way, he was far too cautious ever to place in much jeopardy), by riding after a d——d stinking fox." Richard's grand forte lay with the fair sex, of whom he professed to be the most devoted champion; but, save as pandering to his own pleasures or conducive to his interests, he cared little more about woman-kind than fox-kind. Dick, having felt lately in a very patronising humour towards the *Hebrews*, had suffered considerably in financial affairs, by too near contact with this greatly-abused race; and old Vernon being also rather close-fisted, and highly indignant at his worthy heir's prodigality, his dutiful son, having now attained the great age of twenty-five, resolved to cut the connection with his governor as soon as convenient,—in furtherance of which laudable purpose, he was on the look-out for an heiress.

Of the provincial squires who mustered on this occasion, we must accord a prominent position to Somerville Coventry of Fern Park and John Tyler of Weston Lodge, both good sportsmen and first-rate performers with fox-hounds; and though the last, not the least, we must not omit two sporting Baronets of Leicestershire celebrity, Sir Francis Burnett and Sir Lucius Gwynne, who were then on a visit at Bampton House; with Frederick Beauchamp, a cousin of William's, who could keep his place in the front rank across any country.

Fox-hunters have been accused of being men of one idea only, and their conversation has been represented to be so tinctured or tainted with fox-hunting as to prove highly offensive to persons of more refined intellect. Mankind generally are unjustly censorious of those who differ from them in taste, ideas, or pursuits; but why a fox-hunter should be turned loose as a mark to be fired at alone, when every other man, who talks and prates about his own profession, employment, or peculiar penchant, is to go at large,

scot free, I never could understand. The breakfast table, with scarlet coats seated round it, is as open to fox-hunting chat as politics, although I agree that both these topics should be deemed forbidden ground for discussion in the drawing-room. But, whether in or out of order, it is quite certain that at Bampton House, on the first of November, 18—, the general conversation ran most undeniably on sporting subjects, although in the presence of some of the fair sex, who, by their approving looks and eager attention, seemed anything but *géné* with the topic; in fact an hour had passed thus agreeably, when Bob Conyers, looking at the clock on the chimney slab, suddenly started up, exclaiming, "By Jove! Will,—the time is up."

"No hurry, Bob, this morning!—there are lots of fellows flocking in, who will require a little jumping powder as well as yourself, this fine bracing morning, and we must give them half an hour's law on the opening day."

"Very well, my boy," replied Bob; "once in a way, it don't signify, although half an hour, on

such a morning as this, is a great sacrifice to make for these idle dandies, besides the nuisance they are in the field, always spoiling sport ;—and here comes that long-legged Captain Markham, who is always riding over hounds when they come to a check, but he can't live twenty minutes with them on a good scenting day. To look at his covert hack, one would think he had been riding a steeple chase already this morning. Poor little mare ! how she blows !—and all this haste, merely because he chooses to loiter over his toilet and breakfast table just an hour longer than it would take any other man but a dandy. Such a contrast to his worthy old father, Sir Lionel,—worth a hundred of such puppies ! Dick Vernon (who, by the way, is only one remove from the Captain) told me a good story about him. He had dined and slept at Barton Court the day before our winding up last season, and the Captain being behind time as usual at the breakfast table next morning, Dick walked into his room to hurry him a little, and there found the worthy sitting coolly in his easy chair, in his

dressing gown and slippers, surveying half-a-dozen pairs of buckskins, all ranged in order, on a line of chairs across the room.

"'Halloa! what's the matter, Markham?' exclaimed Dick; 'seedy, I conclude, with a splitting headache?'

"'Oh no, my fine fellow!—all right enough there—had a bottle of soda water, to cool the copper, half an hour ago,—but those leathers all look so bewitchingly inviting, that, 'pon honor, I can't make up my mind which to patronise.'

"'Oh, indeed!' replied Vernon, 'if that's the only difficulty, we'll soon cut the Gordian knot;' so taking the hearth brush, Dick drew it across the three nearest pairs, when the Captain sprung from his chair to prevent further disfiguration of the other beauties, threatening to kick Dick out of the room.

"'Harkee, Markham!' said Dick; 'that you can't do,—so don't try that game; but as breakfast is half over, and we have ten miles to covert, I will give you twenty minutes to dress and finish your breakfast, and not a minute be-

yond that time will I wait.' The Captain, relieved of his difficulties, soon after made his appearance down stairs;—and here he comes, with his well-curled locks and white scented handkerchief in hand, as if he were entering a ball-room. Confound the fellow! say I, and all such nondescripts;—begad, if a fox smelt half as strong as he does, hounds would never be off the line. There, now he is in his element, making fine speeches about nothing to Constance. How charming—how bewitching she looks in her riding costume!—a perfect Diana! and all that sort of trash; but there is one comfort, Will, Con has too much good sense to be taken now with such confounded flummery. A year ago she thought differently, until I took the liberty of opening her eyes a little to the Captain's true character;—but, saving his epaulettes, and being heir-expectant to a baronetcy, Vernon is a much more dangerous man with young girls than the lifeguardsman, for both are playing the same game. Dick is a devilish handsome fellow, with lots of small talk and soft *sawder*, and such

winning, flattering ways with women, that, by Jove! Will, he is a dangerous fellow, and not to be sneezed at!"

"Perhaps not, Bob; but what is he to me? Constance, I know, views him in his proper light, and has known him now too many years to fall in love with him;—moreover, her penchant lies in another direction."

"It was not of Constance I was then thinking," replied Bob, "but of another young pet of mine, Blanche Douglas."

"Well, Bob, and what of her?"

"Only that Markham and Vernon, being both hard up for cash, are laying pretty close siege to the heiress already; and she is so young, artless, and warm-hearted, that I am terribly afraid—and it keeps me awake some nights in thinking—that Vernon bids fair to win the prize, if a certain shy, diffident young fellow, called Will Beauchamp, does not come to the rescue."

"Pshaw, Bob!—you know I am not a ladies' man, and, like yourself, will never marry any girl for her money. Besides, I should be obliged to

plead my cause in a parody on the words of the 'Pirate's Serenade'—

"Forgive my rough mode, unaccustomed to sue,
I woo not, perhaps, *as your soft dandies do;*
My voice has been tuned to the *cry of the hounds,*
When with shrill notes and screeches the coppice resounds."

"Well, Will Beauchamp,—and yet I'll warrant that any woman of sense would prefer an honest, plain-sailing, plain-spoken fellow, like yourself, to all the dandies in Christendom."

"No, no, Bob,—women like and value all those little attentions and soft whisperings, which Will Beauchamp has neither the time nor the inclination to bestow;—for a false tongue, in man or hound, is my abomination, and I will never condescend to flatter man, woman, or child."

"And who ever thought you would, Mr. Will?—none of your true friends, I'll engage; and least of all Bob Conyers; and that's the reason I want you to tell Blanche Douglas that she must not think of marrying either Markham

or Vernon; a hint from you, Beauchamp, will be enough; she will take your advice; for, to my knowledge, your opinions are highly regarded by the heiress."

"There you are mistaken, Bob; women in affairs of that kind will run riot and have their own way; and the more I were to disparage Markham or Vernon, the more should I be favouring their cause, and be looked upon as an impertinent puppy into the bargain, for presuming to dictate to the young lady in the choice of a husband."

"Well, Beauchamp, perhaps you are right; for young ladies, like young fillies, are ticklish animals to handle, and will bolt sometimes in the contrary direction you wish them to go. It would not do, perhaps, for *you* to touch on this subject; but as I have dandled her on my knee when a child, she shall know a bit of *my* mind at all events."

"Only with one *proviso*, Bob,—that you never allude to me in any way, direct or indirect, or I will never forgive you."

"Very well, Beauchamp; that you are a confounded sensitive fellow, I know full well; but I know this also, which you don't seem to know yourself, that you think deeply sometimes of Blanche, and there is a peculiar expression about your eyes, and hers also, when talking together, which has struck me more than once."

"Fancy, Bob, fancy! only a rather wide stretch of your discursive imagination; but I am wedded already, and here comes Charley with my family."

"Ay, and as handsome a lot as ever the sun shone on; so now to horse, Will; but I shall meet you to-morrow, at Harcourt's, I hope?"

"Perhaps you may, as Constance goes, and has accepted for two, which means, I believe, herself and me."

While William Beauchamp and Conyers had been discussing these matters, *sotto voce*, in a bay window at the extreme end of the room, other visitors had been thronging in, to pay their respects to the old squire and the ladies;

and sherry, with fine sparkling October, was freely circulated amongst the strangers and farmers on the lawn; when, on the appearance of the hounds, all eyes were at once directed towards them.

"Ah, Beauchamp!" exclaimed Sir Francis, "there is a sight worth riding a hundred miles to view, a splendid pack indeed! we can't beat you in Leicestershire at that game. Magnificent animals! but I should think a trifle too big for our fences, where a smaller hound can creep through."

"Well, perhaps it may be as you say," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "although our hounds go at their fences like greyhounds; they are too highly bred for creeping where they can jump; and in our stiff vale country, with high banks and double ditches, and the lands, after heavy rain, half under water, I think small hounds would never do the work ours do,—at least, not in their style; and, with foxhounds, style, in my opinion, is everything."

"Right, my old friend, you are quite right,

style is the thing with foxhounds. Harriers may hunt a fox to death, but they can't finish him off in the same style as foxhounds."

"Well, then there is another reason why I prefer large hounds (not heavy, lumbering, throaty brutes, whose heads are so heavy that, when once down, they can't get them up again), but with clean heads and necks, and straight, muscular limbs, active and lightsome as tigers; they have power and strength to work over our heavy country, and come cheerfully home after the hardest day, with courage unabated, and sterns well up. Besides, every man has not the brains to breed a big, clever hound; and I dislike little men, little women, little horses, and little hounds, although they are all very well in their way, but not to my taste."

"Well, Beauchamp," replied Sir Francis, "you have succeeded to the utmost of your wishes, for I never yet saw so fine and handsome a pack of foxhounds as that now before me, and if they can go the pace, they are quite perfection."

"That you will see also by-and-by, Burnett, if the scent holds."

"Come, then, let us mount and away, for I see your son is already in the saddle, and anxious to begin."

CHAPTER II.

THE breakfast-room was cleared in a trice, and many polite offers made by Fred Beauchamp, Vernon, and Markham, to lift Miss Constance on her beautiful bay, which stood at the hall door, with Bob Conyers carefully examining the girths and bridle.

"Thank you," she said, "for your kind attentions, but my friend Mr. Conyers would be highly offended were I to accept any other hand than his, which was the first to place me on horseback."

"Well, Con," said Bob, as he adjusted her

habit, after vaulting her into the saddle, "you look like your father's own child this morning, and I'll back your seat and management on horseback against all the riding-school-taught misses in England."

"Ah, Mr. Conyers," she exclaimed, laughing, "that is a little vanity on your part, because you were my instructor."

"Well, Miss Beauchamp," interposed Vernon, "Conyers may be justly proud of such a highly finished and graceful pupil."

"Thank you, Mr. Vernon, for your compliment; but fine speeches are thrown away upon a fox-hunter's daughter, which I told you once before, this morning;" and lightly touching her horse with the whip, he sprang instantly away, capering and kicking, to the consternation of Markham and those near; but Constance never moved an inch from her seat, and bounded off, with Bob at her side, laughing and patting her horse on the neck, delighted with his gambols.

"By gad, Vernon!" exclaimed the Captain, "that's a deuced fine horsewoman, sits like a

jockey, but her horse's heels were devilish near finding out whether I had any brains in my head."

"Not many there, I'll answer for," replied Vernon, "and none to spare;" saying which, he galloped away to overtake Miss Beauchamp. The whole cavalcade were now on the move. Will Beauchamp with the pack, and his two whippers-in, taking the lead, and close behind them, Mr. Beauchamp, Sir Francis Burnett, and old Sir Lionel Markham, who had only just arrived.

"Why, Markham," exclaimed the Squire, "we gave you up as not intending to honour us this morning, and Constance said she was sure you must be very ill, not to patronise her breakfast table on our gala day."

"No, Beauchamp, thank goodness I am hearty and well, but had some confounded long-winded business letters to write and post to-day; and thinking it very doubtful where our Park-wood fox might lead us, I sat down and answered them at once; but they spoilt my appetite for breakfast. However, here we are, just in the

nick of time, to see Will's darlings before they dash into covert. By Jove! Beauchamp, they are beauties indeed; their coats like satin, and the very acme of condition, ribs well defined, flanks light, and how gingerly too they step along, like dandies in cork-heeled boots, heads here, heads there; by Jove! Sir, there'll be a scent to-day."

"So say I, Markham; and when once away, they will bid you and me good bye."

"Never mind, my old friend, knowledge of country is half the battle, and we shall, I hope, be there, or thereabouts, at the finish. Now then, away they go, slap dash into covert; one wave of Will's hand, and not a hound is to be seen outside. Beautifully done! Yoic over, my lads, that's all—and away goes Charley, sneaking along like his namesake, quickly but silently to the further end of the covert. Quick, open the gate into the drive, and now see how they dash, and fly over the stuff—heads up too, by Jove! they wind him—there's a fox on foot I'll swear. Hark! Bounty has found him."

"Hoic! hoic!" cries Will. In a minute the chorus is complete, every tongue proclaiming the glad tidings that a fox is found.

"By Jove, what a crash! they are close to his brush—and now Will's scream, he is over the drive, mark how they dash, and fling across into the high wood, in their wide—spreading column, carrying every thing before them. Go he must, or die."

"Now, Burnett," cried Mr. Beauchamp, "put in the spurs, and away to the opposite gate, at the further end of the drive; we old fellows will follow."

The Leicestershire man was gone in a moment, and had just left the wood, when Mr. Beauchamp suddenly exclaimed, "Stop, Markham, the hounds are at fault, and I hear Charley's holloa and rate, hark back again. Just as I feared—those coffee-housing cigar fellows have headed the fox back into covert. Ay, ay, now they are at him again; he is still holding to the outskirts of the wood, but the horsemen prevent his breaking. Now, Markham, steady a moment, they are

turning, and we shall see them cross the drive before us. Look, yonder he goes," (as at a couple of bounds the fox cleared the drive) ; and with a scream which made the welkin ring, the old Squire rushed to the spot, and cap in hand, cheered his darlings on the scent.

" Now, Markham, we must forget our age, and stick to him ; this fox means mischief, and will break at the lower end ; come on, now is our time, we have them all to ourselves, and there is a capital line of gates up to the furze hills, which is his point." Clapping spurs to their horses, the two old sportsmen bustled along down the nearest drive, which led to the bottom of the covert, and when they reached the gate, the pack was streaming away over the second large grass field, with heads up and sterns down, running as if they could see him.

" By Jove, what a pace, Beauchamp ! we shall never catch them."

" Come along," roared the Squire, and bang he went over the first bullfinch. " Now for the gates—here we are, it's plain sailing now, and

turf all the way. Give Hotspur his head, I say; put him along;" and fast and furious went the old Squire, screaming and spurring as if in the hey-day of his youth.

"Hah! hah!" laughed Sir Lionel, "this is glorious fun! the dandies won't sneer at the old fogies to-day, nor the Leicestershire men override the hounds. But here comes Will, I declare, with half-a-dozen fellows striving for the lead; but it won't do—Rattler holds his own, and has the speed of them all—Bang, bang, over the gates, here he comes. Ah! Will, you've caught us at last, my boy."

"Glad to see you, Sir, riding so well to-day; you gave us the slip at starting with the governor; but keep up the ball, Sir Lionel, now you have set it going. You won't be over-ridden yet awhile."

"Go along, Will, never mind me—Beauchamp and I will fight on as long as we can."

"Well done, my dear Dad," cried his son, as he rode by his side for a few seconds, "you handed them cheerily over the drive, now, good

bye, and beware of those helter-skelter fellows behind."

The hounds had now gained the furze hills, where a large patch of thick gorse gave the fox an opportunity of recovering second wind, the nature of the covert preventing his foes pressing him so closely as in the more open copse wood; and here they remained dodging about until the whole field, consisting of a hundred and fifty horsemen, or thereabouts, joined them.

"Well, Burnett," exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, "was that fast enough for you?"

"Can't say exactly, my friend, as a man is not expected to ride through a hundred acres of underwood as he would over a stubble field; but this patch of gorse is more to my taste, from which they won't give me the slip quite so easily. By Gad, this puts one in mind of Leicestershire, fine open pastures all around,—hounds cannot run away from us here."

"Don't make too sure of that, Burnett," replied Mr. Beauchamp; "you will find it stiff work across that vale, with ditches deep enough to hold a

horse, with only his head above water; but look, Charley's cap is held up, the fox is away, and now comes the tug of war." In a second, Will's scream brought the pack all round him, and settling down to the scent, they flashed away like lightning.

"Now, master Will," cried Sir Francis, taking his place by his side, "I mean to keep you company, and see if your paragons can run away from me."

"Come on then, Sir Francis, here's something to begin with," as a stiff ox fence, about six feet high, stood across the common, right before them, over which the hounds had just dashed. Sir Francis put on the steam, going at the leap full speed, which prevented his horse measuring his distance, and his stride bringing him too near the fence for a good take off, he swerved suddenly aside, and threw his rider. William Beauchamp, by pulling up a little, enabled his horse to take it in his own style, and clearing it, he rode quickly away on the other side. As Sir Francis fell, two stout hard-riding young farmers came

down together at the fence, which being broken by their weight, made a gap for others to pass easily over; and the Baronet never having quitted his hold of the reins, was soon in his saddle again, going fast and furiously, to make up for lost time. Charley remarked to his master, "The Leicestershire Baronet won't ride over them to-day, Sir, I think."

"Not if we can hold on this pace," was the reply; "but if we come to a check, he will be in upon us directly."

About a score of the first flight were now with Sir Francis, all striving for the lead; and the Baronet, to escape them, sent his horse flying at a stiff double fence, landing him with his heels in the ditch on the other side, the shock again dislodging the rider from his seat.

"Eh! Burnett," exclaimed Captain Markham, who had landed by his side, "that was a nasty one, old boy? much damaged, old fellow?"

"Pray, mind your own business, Sir," retorted the Baronet, angrily; "I don't want your assistance."

"Oh! ah! peppery old boy!—soon get cooled a little,—fine piece of water just below."

"In which I hope you'll be drowned, you conceited fool!" muttered the Baronet, as he sprang on his horse's back.

Bob Conyers (having left Constance on the furze hills to return home with her groom) now rode up, and joined Sir Francis. "It won't do, Sir," said he good-humouredly, "going at our banks and double ditches in that fashion, or you will get a fall in every field; just let your horse see how mine takes them on and off the bank, and he will soon catch the trick."

"Thank you, Mr. Conyers; I see no horse can clear these ready-made graves at a fly, and I must now follow your example; but it can't be done in a minute, with this rushing brute, who *will go* in his accustomed style."

"Then take my horse, and I will ride yours," said Bob.

"Oh no, my good friend, there is no time for changing, so come along;" and another pip was the result, man and horse rolling into the next field.

"You're not hurt, I hope?" said Conyers.

"No," replied Sir Francis, "I'm used to this sort of thing, often ride for a fall to get the other side."

"That's more than I should like to do," remarked Bob; "a fall ain't so pleasant, that I should ride for it."

"Must be done in Leicestershire sometimes, to keep with hounds, Sir."

"Oh, very likely," replied Bob; "but in this country it's not the fashion to do things in that way; *we* stick to the pig's skin."

"Hah! hah!" quoth Jack Tyler to his neighbour, Sir Lucius, who was riding with him, and looking back on the prostrate baronet; "we sha'n't be troubled much more with his company. Now for the brook, Gwynne. A sovereign, Markham is in it for one, and Coventry for another; they never can go at water."

Sir Francis here passed them at a furious pace, going at the brook forty miles an hour, and, with a cheer, landed safely over. "Now

Captain Markham," he cried, "come along!" and souse went the guardsman into the stream.

"Hah! hah! my boy!" shouted the baronet, "pleasant and cool, I hope, and all that sort of thing! Good bye, Captain, and mind you don't drink too hard."

"Demn that old crack-jawed fallow!" chattered the captain, with drawn breath, and teeth rattling like castanets; "but I'll be the death of that fire-eater, if ever I get on his track again."

Fred Beauchamp, although laughing ready to split his sides, gave the Captain's horse a lifting hand, and they were soon again on terra firma. "Thank'e, Fred," said Markham, "I'll do the same for you another time; but demmit all, I'll ride in the wake of that Leicestershire hero, and knock him over the very first fence we reach together."

"Easier said than done, Markham, for he's going at a trimming pace now."

"Then here goes to catch him." And away they rattled.

It is needless to relate the various casualties that occurred over four miles of stiff enclosures, which the hounds traversed at such a pace that none but their huntsmen and two whippers-in were ever near them, till they reached a large woodland called the holt, where all hoped for some little respite to their blown horses; but in vain; the gallant fox held on his course, going straight through this line of coverts, reaching nearly three miles in extent, and again bravely faced the open. The heavy, sticky nature of the soil in the drives (being a yellow clay) told fearful tales on the already distressed horses, whose riders still pushed them along, there being no fences to impede their progress.

"Holloa, Bob!" cried Vernon, who was riding behind him, "you've lost a shoe."

"Nothing more likely, Dick; but if I had lost all four, instead of one, there's no time for repairs, for I hear the horn again to the left, and the hounds are away."

"And where now, Conyers?" enquired the Captain; "not across another brook, I hope?"

"Even so, Markham—the forest is his point, some six miles a-head, if Will and Charlie don't handle him, before he reaches it. Forward, away! come along, you thrusting scoundrels!"

Having cleared the wood, about fifty horsemen showed on the other side, the Leicestershire baronet taking up the running at a determined pace, to retrieve his lost laurels; and the fences being now lighter, he kept the lead, for about three miles, to the top of a rising ground, from whence the forest might be seen in the distance; but the pace to the hill told tales on his gallant horse, which staggered and fell at the last gate, rolling over him. The next four leading men left the baronet as he lay; but Bob Conyers, seeing the accident, went directly to his assistance, and, jumping from his saddle, helped him to rise.

"You are hurt now, Burnett," he said, "or, at least, ought to be."

"I feel queer and giddy," replied Sir Francis, in a choking voice; "but help me on the saddle, I shall be all right again."

"No, you won't just yet, and if I put you up one side, you would tumble over the other; it won't do, Burnett, so just sit down where you are; take a pull at my flask, and let's see if you have any ribs smashed."

"Oh, nothing of that sort, I believe," said Sir Francis, faintly, "but my left shoulder pains me uncommonly."

"And no wonder!" exclaimed Bob, examining his arm, "it's out of the socket. Here, Stubbins," cried Bob, to a young farmer just riding up, "lend a hand; catch hold of Sir Francis, and hold him tight and strong, as you would a bullock by the horns, whilst I put his shoulder to rights;"—when, taking him by the hand, with his knee under the baronet's armpit, Bob pulled with all his might, and snap went the bone into its proper place again; but Sir Francis fainted from the pain.

"Ah, never mind, Stubbins, leave him now, and you go on, my good fellow, with many thanks for your ready help."

Whilst Bob was attending his friend, many

were brought to grief in the vale below. Markham, Vernon, and three others came down together to the second brook, at which (company giving courage) they charged nearly abreast; but Markham's horse, being a little in advance, and swerving aside at the brink (having no relish for a second dipping), Vernon and the rest, not being able to pull up, knocked him over, and themselves too, pell-mell, into the water, where the Captain, from being undermost, was in a fair way of being drowned, had not a sporting yeoman jumped into the brook and dragged him from his horse. As it was, when placed on the bank, the Captain looked more dead than alive, until relieved of nearly a bucket of fluid.

"Eh! aw! demmit, Vernon!" was his first exclamation. "I feel demned uncomfortable, old fellow."

"That's not unlikely, my boy, after swallowing mud and water enough to choke an alligator. Confound these brooks, with their rotten banks! I'll not ride another inch after that fellow Will Beauchamp, so get up, Markham, and let

us have a glass of hot brandy and water at the nearest public, and then home as hard as we can gallop."

Many others, some from funking the brook, some from seeing no prospect of again catching the hounds, followed Vernon's example, trotting off home; and of the whole field, not half-a-score went on to the finish.

As Conyers was assisting the baronet on his horse, he exclaimed—"Hark! by Jove they have him!—That's Will Beauchamp's whoo-hoop! for a thousand.—Ay, there it is again; no doubt about it now; and as I live, the old squire's scream as well! But how the dickens *he* got there puzzles me! Now, Burnett, it's all over; and we will walk our horses quietly down into that lane yonder, to meet them. In about twenty minutes the pack was seen leisurely jogging towards them, with Charley and the fox's head at his saddle.

"Well done, my darlings!" shouted Bob, "but where did you handle him, Charley?"

"Pulled him down, sir," replied the whip-

per-in, touching his cap, "just two fields this side the forest."

"By Gad, Charley, that was cleverly done!"

"Yes, sir, a bit of luck on our side to-day, but he had it twice before on his."

"Why, Beauchamp, my old friend," exclaimed Sir Francis, as the worthy squire approached, "how in the world could you manage to be where you are?"

"Easily enough, Burnett; *you* ride straight; *I* ride cunning, and craft wins this time; but what's the matter? with your arm in a sling? no broken bones, I hope?"

"Shoulder put out, and in again; now it's all right, thanks to your friend Conyers, who gave up his sport to assist me."

"No merit in the case," replied Conyers; "old Plowman was dead beat, and I was glad of an excuse to pull up."

"Don't believe him for once, Beauchamp," said Sir Francis.

"Ay, ay, Bob!" exclaimed the squire; "we know Plowman and yourself quite well enough

to swallow no more of that story than we think proper."

"Well, Beauchamp, what now?" enquired Sir Francis; "where's the next draw?"

"Home, so says Will; and there are few to say nay to that. What think you, Coventry?"

"The only thing to be done, in my opinion, Beauchamp. We have had a capital run of at least twelve miles in an hour and twenty minutes, and I am more than satisfied. Enough, sir, is as good as a feast, to any but a glutton; and I like, for the sake of the hounds, to leave well alone."

"And you, Gwynne and Tyler, what are your ideas?"

"Quantum suff.," replied Sir Lucius, "and I'll answer for Tyler's being of the same opinion, to say nothing of two lost shoes, for which he must fork out at the next smithy."

"Eh, Gwynne, you don't mean that?"

"Then dismount and see; 'tis true enough."

"We don't ask your opinion, Burnett, and will save you the trouble of expressing it,—a

warm bath and bed being ordered by your physician."

"Another twenty minutes would suit me quite as well," replied Sir Francis.

"Very likely, and another fracture perhaps," added the squire; "but I don't want my house turned into an hospital for my friends; so home is the word."

With the exception of Tyler and Conyers, the dinner-party that evening at Bampton House might be termed a family one,—the squire never inviting much company on hunting days, it being so uncertain at what hour they might sit down to table. The only ladies were Constance and her friend Miss Raymond, a lively, cheerful person, in age somewhat Constance's senior, who was then on a visit at Bampton. Sir Francis, notwithstanding his hurts and bruises, entered an appearance at the dinner table, and made a tolerable fight with soup and fish, and a savoury dish of minced venison, which the squire had ordered to be prepared expressly for him, seeing he had only one hand com-

fortably at command ; and after the ladies had retired, he was cozily ensconced in a large arm-chair, with a little table at his side, close to the fireplace, and a jug of mulled claret, hot and spicy, for his particular discussion, placed thereon.

" Ah, Beauchamp, my kind old friend, you know how to make your guests feel happy and at home, and now I'm just in the humour to hear how you managed to be in at the finish to-day ; it's a mystery to me."

" But easily solved," replied the squire, " as thus :—having viewed the fox across the drive in Parkwood, I knew his long white tag to be the same we had followed twice last season to the forest, when the owner thereof beat us, and from his trying at first to break at top of the covert, where the cigar men headed him, I knew very well he would make good his point—at least, if able to do so."

" But why did he run to the furze-hills then ?"

" To turn up another of his family connec-

tions, perhaps, in place of his own precious carcass, or to take second wind by dodging his pursuers in the thick gorse there. But when he broke the second time, in a line for the Holt, thinks I to myself, he now means the forest; and turning into an old lane, I and Markham, having seen you going to the left, bore straight away for the forest, as hard as we could go, and as it so happened, we were not far out in our reckoning. The fox, entering the other side of the Holt, threaded the whole length of those coverts, and being down wind, we could hear the hounds turning towards us, still we slackened not our pace until we reached a hard road, which leads straight through the forest. Here we pulled up for a few seconds, when hearing the horn outside the covert, we again rode fast for a couple of miles to rising ground, from which I caught sight of the hounds, running almost mute, with the fox only two fields before them. My old blood boiled up at the sight, and Highflier pricking up his ears, impatient to be with them again, we bundled through the forest fence

and forgetful of our years, stuck to them, as Charley said, 'like good'uns'; in fact, my horse's mettle was up, and go he would at every thing, until we pulled him down in the open. Will, Charley, and myself screaming in chorus, for the last two fields, when they had him in view, as if the fiend possessed us; and whether a six-barred gate or a river had come in our way just then, it would have been of little consequence. There, Burnett, is the history of my adventures to-day; now, what were yours?"

"My tale is soon told, Beauchamp. By being thrown out at the first fence, my chance was over, barring checks; but trying to make up for lost ground, I pumped the wind out of Skyscraper, who in revenge gave me six falls in the first four miles, and after leaving the Holt, a couple more; in the last of which, to settle the business, he fell and lay upon me. For the rest, I must refer you to that good Samaritan Conyers."

"Who, I am happy to say," chimed in Bob, "arrived just in time to prevent Skyscraper

rolling you out for a pancake, on which agreeable occupation he appeared to be most industriously intent, when your humble servant reached the scene of action. Those who have seen a donkey on his back, pertinaciously bent on turning himself over on the highest side of the ground, may form some idea of your comfortable position, with Skyscraper trying to play the same trick, and act as a rolling-pin on your prostrate body."

"Well, well, Burnett," said the squire, "it is well, indeed, you are able to sit in that arm-chair, after such a pounding, and sip your claret so satisfactorily. Such a process would have played old gooseberry with my victualling department."

"Never mind, Sir Francis," said Fred Beauchamp, "you won't be the only man with sore bones to-night, if I may judge by the glimpse I had of our friends in the rear, when looking back from Craig-hill. Horses without riders going in all directions, and such a lot of craners at the brook! Markham, I suspect, had a second cold bath there, but we shall hear all

about it to-morrow evening at Harcourt's, who sent me an especial invite; and I am told all the world and his wife are to be there."

"Ah! I suppose to parade the heiress," remarked Mr. Beauchamp.

"She don't want parading, Squire, I'll engage," put in Bob Conyers.

"Oh! I see—I beg pardon, Bob; forgot she is a pet of yours."

"And isn't that enough, my worthy old friend, to convince you she is no forward, affected Miss, but one of the right sort, although she is an heiress? *That* can't be helped, yet she will make a thorough good fox-hunter's wife, notwithstanding, and a huntsman's too," in a low voice, audible only to his next neighbour, Will Beauchamp.

"I wish your words may prove true, Bob," said Mr. Beauchamp.

"And that you may have an opportunity of judging whether I am a true prophet or not," added Conyers. "Now, Will, pass the bottle, I'll give you a toast, and as a preface, a stanza

from Moore," which he sang in a rich melodious voice—

" Fill the bumpers fair,
Every drop we sprinkle,
From the brow of care
Smooths away a wrinkle."

" Bravo ! Bob," shouted Sir Lucius. " We are warming up a little now,—go a-head !"

" Now, gentlemen, are you ready ?—bumpers all round ?" enquired Bob, without noticing Sir Lucius' remarks.

" Ay, ay," was the general response.

Then said he, rising,—" Here's to the health of Blanche Douglas ; and may she have a fox-hunter for her husband." Every glass was emptied in a second. " Thank you, my friends ; and now, Sir Lucius, I'll give you one more verse from Tommy Moore,—with the chorus.

" Wit's electric flame
Ne'er so swiftly passes,
As when through the frame
It shoots from brimming glasses.
(" Now the Chorus," aside.)
Fill the bumpers, fair,
Every, &c."

In which all joined most heartily, not excepting the squire and Sir Francis.

"Couldn't you favour us with another stanza?" said the latter.

"Not to-night, Burnett, although you know '*Dulce est desipere in loco*;' but the other verses are not much to my taste; and besides that, I must reserve my sweet voice for Miss Constance, with whom I have promised to warble a stave or two."

Soon after, coffee was introduced, and an adjournment made to the drawing-room, where music and singing brought the evening to a happy conclusion, with this select and cheerful party of friends; the gentlemen not being sorry to retire rather early to their rooms, after the fatigues of the day. Sir Francis was obliged to take the lead upstairs about eleven o'clock, escorted by his considerate friend, who insisted on seeing he had everything comfortable.

Whilst the family are locked in the arms of Morpheus, we may take the liberty of an author, who has the privilege of burning the midnight

oil, to give a short description of the edifice under whose roof the family of Beauchamp and their guests were now reposing.

Bampton House was a large, long building, with gable ends, situated at the extreme end of a fine avenue of magnificent beech and elm trees of immense proportions; showing the excellence of the soil from which they sprang, not only by their large dimensions, but the altitude of their stems, which can only be attained on superior land. Over the entrance was an old-fashioned portico, reached by a flight of steps on either side, and closed in the front. The hall was lofty and spacious, with an old carved oak staircase, leading up from the centre, and branching off on either side, and a huge fire-place, with old iron dogs, on which large logs of wood were piled, reflecting sufficient heat almost to roast an ox. An antiquated brass chandelier, shining like gold, was suspended from the centre of the ceiling; and from the oak panels were suspended the portraits of many generations past, long since mingled into dust. The heads

and antlers of stags and fallow-deer (the park containing both species) were tastefully arranged over the fire place and doors, with old-fashioned guns, cross-bows, and armour disposed in the intervals between the family pictures.

The drawing-room, with its painted glass windows, was upwards of forty feet in length, thirty wide, and lofty in proportion, with a high massive stone chimney-piece, elaborately carved, on which were emblazoned the family arms, with their numerous quarterings.

Old oak cabinets, with curiously carved and worked high-backed chairs of the same material, inlaid tables, and a motley assemblage of other furniture of very ancient date, with a splendid display of old china, helped to fill up the vacant places in this finely proportioned apartment, giving it an air of comfort and sociability, not often found in rooms of this size. The dining-room was of longer dimensions, though not so wide, and being an older part of the house, not so lofty, but the ceiling was divided into compartments by elaborately carved oak beams. At

the lower end stood a sideboard, extending nearly from wall to wall, of the same old dark wood.

The library was of smaller size, containing a fine collection of books, and the favourite resort of Mr. Beauchamp and his family, when there were no visitors staying at Bampton. The building which comprised the stables, coach-house, &c., was a splendid structure, faced with finely-polished stone, having stalls and loose boxes for thirty horses; and over the centre was erected a large cupola, with a clock, which relieved the structure from the monotony of its rather extreme length.

The kennels were large enough to hold easily a hundred couples of hounds, although the pack seldom amounted to that number, except when the young hounds were brought home in the spring of the year from their walks. The kitchen-garden extended over two acres of ground, laid out in various divisions, with wide walks of grass and gravel; producing fruit and vegetables sufficient to supply several families all the year round; but the old squire liked a

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profusion of every kind, and all at Bampton was on a large scale.

There was also what may be considered in these days a curiosity—an apiary, or bee-yard, consisting of about a hundred hives, the greater portion of the honey being devoted to the concoction of metheglin or mead, for which delicious compound (the very old wine being equal to frontignac) Bampton Manor had long been celebrated. It were almost needless to say that the old squire took great pride in having everything of the best, both in and out of the house; and the cellars contained, besides wines of the best vintages, the finest beer and best pressed cider in the whole county, as well as a large supply of brown stout (resembling porter), made from an old family receipt.

CHAPTER III.

On the following morning, William Beauchamp was the first to enter the sleeping-chamber of Sir Francis Burnett, to enquire how he had passed the night?

"Very indifferently," was the reply; "my arm has pained me greatly, and I feel fevered and restless."

"I am sorry indeed to hear it, Sir Francis, and hope you will follow my advice in keeping to your bed; there is nothing like warmth and rest in such cases; and my father, who is a good doctor, will make you a composing draught,

unless you prefer seeing our country Esculapius."

"No, no, Beauchamp, I don't want the contents of an apothecary's shop poured down my throat; a seidlitz-powder will do quite as well as any of their stuff."

"That you can have directly," said Beauchamp, ringing the bell; "and if you will put yourself under the governor's care for a couple of days, he will soon bring you round again."

"Well, I hope so, Will; but old bones won't stand bruising like young ones; and you know I am old enough to be your father, although still strong and heart-whole."

"You went like a man of five-and-twenty yesterday," observed Beauchamp.

"Yes, yes, when hounds run, I must be with them; but now sit down a moment, and tell me about these Harcourts, where you are going this evening. Your father does not seem to fancy them, I see; and the heiress, who is she?"

"Mr. Harcourt is no fox-hunter," replied Beauchamp—"but of good family—very fond of

money,—in short, a bit of a Nabob; and, being of different politics, he and my father don't quite suit each other."

"I should be surprised if they did," remarked Sir Francis.

"Mrs. Harcourt is rather a fine lady too—fond of dress, fond of company, very agreeable, and still handsome—younger by ten years than her husband, who owns to fifty."

"Any family?" enquired Sir Francis.

"None whatever."

"Now the heiress, what of her?"

"She is in her seventeenth year, or thereabout, rather tall, but of a well-proportioned figure, of most pleasing and expressive, though not strikingly handsome, features, yet a very lovely girl, affectionate and lively in disposition, not in the least affected or conceited, and, should she live to the age of twenty-one, will inherit all her father's property in Scotland, at least ten thousand a-year, besides what her uncle and guardian, Mr. Harcourt, may choose to leave her. She has also an aunt on her father's side, Mrs.

Gordon, living at the Priory, whose late husband, dying in India, left her all his property; and she has neither chick nor child."

"Upon my word, Beauchamp," replied Sir Francis, "this Miss Douglas won't want suitors by the dozen. Why, William, that ten thousand per annum would help to keep the pack going."

Beauchamp shook his head, saying, "It won't do, Sir Francis."

"And why not, sir?"

"Because of the many bad names the world may give me, a fortune-hunter sha'n't be one."

"Pshaw, Beauchamp! all that is trash; "what is the world to you?"

"Not much; yet, the insinuation that I had married a girl for her money would not be very agreeable."

"But as a man of sense, knowing it to be false, you ought not to care a rush about it."

"Appearances would be against me, Sir Francis, and they are everything in the eyes of the world; irrespective of which, I am not in love with Blanche Douglas."

"Then take my advice, Beauchamp, and fall in love with her as soon as you conveniently can. So now go to your breakfast, and send me up a cup of coffee."

Preparations were made on a grand scale at Throseby Hall (Mr. Harcourt's seat) for the company expected to grace the dinner-table that evening, about five-and-twenty guests being invited, including Sir Lionel and Lady Markham, with their two eldest daughters, Selina and Caroline, and the Captain; Lord and Lady Mervyn and daughter, from Marston Castle; Colonel and Mrs. Rolleston, of Warley, and two daughters; Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill, of the Down House, with their daughter Isabella, Sir Lucius Wynne, Bob Conyers, Vernon, Tyler, and Fred Beauchamp, with his two cousins, William and Constance; Mrs. Gordon, of the Priory, was also expected to make one of the party.

At a quarter before seven, the hour of dinner in fashionable circles at that time (the greater part of the company having assembled

in the saloon), the door was thrown open, and Mr. William and Miss Beauchamp were announced; and many a jealous glance was directed towards them, to scrutinize the deportment of this fondly attached brother and sister, who quietly approached the mistress of the house, by whom they were most courteously received, and then, turning to other acquaintances, mixed among the company.

Constance was most warmly greeted by her friend Blanche, accepting a seat by her side on the sofa, from which she had just risen. They were soon joined by the Captain and Vernon, who were both striving for the honour of handing the heiress to the dinner-table.

"Really, Miss Beauchamp," lisped the Captain, "you rode quite bootifully yesterday—suppose you will take the lead soon across country—quite a divinity, Miss Douglas, on horseback—I assure you, 'pon honour—hand and seat quite perfection. When shall I have the honour of charging a gate in such delightful company?"

"I never ride at gates, Captain Markham,

and seldom over any fence; but at brooks, I think, we should soon part company, as I am told Captain Markham prefers swimming through to jumping over."

"Eh,—aw,—why, yaas, I did get a ducking yesterday, and was nearly drowned by Pegasus rolling in upon me—a near thing, Vernon, eh!"

"Not much danger, Markham, with half-a-dozen fellows all round you, in only four feet water; but next time, my boy, we can make a nearer thing of it, by keeping your head under water a little longer."

"Much obliged, Vernon, but hope I sha'n't need your kind services."

"Perhaps not, although young animals of a certain class are often consigned to the water, to which you seem to have an instinctive partiality."

"Don't take, Vernon; what description of animal?"

"Guess, Markham."

Constance, turning to Blanche, whispered something in her ear, at which both enjoyed a hearty laugh, much to the Captain's annoyance.

"Eh, Miss Constance, you know what Vernon means!"

"How should I, Captain Markham? I can only guess."

"Well, what do you guess, then?"

"I do not feel quite at liberty to say what I think."

"Not far out, I suspect," added Vernon, with a cynical smile at the ladies.

"Demmit, Vernon, then what do you mean, if you know your own meaning; what animals are consigned to the water?"

"Young puppies."

"Eh! 'pon honour can't see the wit of the thing."

"Didn't suppose you would," replied Vernon, as the discomfited life-guardsman walked away in high dudgeon.

When the dinner was announced, Vernon's arm was immediately offered and accepted by the heiress, and, at the same moment, Bob Conyers coming up claimed Constance. Whilst this conversation had been carried on, William Beau-

champ was sitting next to Mrs. Gordon, with whom he was a great favourite.

"So I hear," she said, "you were out hunting yesterday, and had a capital run."

"Yes, pretty good," was the reply; "but you know, my dear Mrs. Gordon, fox-hunting is a forbidden topic in the drawing-room, and I generally avoid entering into any conversation of that kind with ladies."

"And why so, Mr. William?"

"Because it cannot be very agreeable to them, I should think."

"Just as agreeable, perhaps, as our talking about worsted work, silks and satins, muslins and flounces, is to you."

"Well, I am rather particular on this point, because, being now the Master of the Fox-hounds, illnatured people will say I am leading to my own praises."

"And what will not illnatured people say?" replied Mrs. Gordon; "anything and everything but what they ought to say; however, as you forbid the subject, I must talk to you now

about my own affairs, and that's selfish enough."

"But always interesting to me," added Beauchamp.

"No flattery, William—that I dislike, especially from you; but now tell me what day you will be disengaged next week, as I wish to consult you about some alterations I purpose making in my grounds and flower-garden."

"Any day most suitable to yourself (barring our hunting days), I will with pleasure ride over to the Priory."

"And stay and dine with me, mind, that's the condition," said Mrs. Gordon.

"And not a very irksome one, either," replied Beauchamp.

"Well, then, will Tuesday suit you?" enquired Mrs. Gordon.

"Exactly," was his reply.

"So let it be then, but don't expect to meet company, as I must have you entirely to myself, to talk over other matters, when we can draw our chairs round the fire, and enjoy a cozy chat."

A movement was now making to the dining room, when Beauchamp said, "Allow me the honour of offering you my arm."

"No, William, you must do the attentive to some younger lady. Where is Blanche?"

"Already pounced upon by Vernon."

"Ah! I dislike that man; his attentions to my niece are too particular to have escaped my notice; but Blanche, although young and unsuspicious, has too much good sense to be taken with a handsome face and fine speeches only."

"I hope so," said Beauchamp seriously; "but"—and he paused.

"What, William?"

"Vernon is considered almost irresistible with the fair sex, and our mutual friend, Conyers, declares he dreads his influence over your niece, which is becoming very apparent."

"Does Robert Conyers say so?" enquired Mrs. Gordon, anxiously.

"Yes; indeed he told me so only yesterday morning."

"Then there may be some cause for alarm,

and I must have a *téte-à-téte* with him on the subject. Now, William, as the company is pairing off, I will take your arm, and be envied by half, if not all the young ladies in the room, for carrying off their *preux chevalier.* As they were entering the dining room, Mrs. Gordon whispered, " The other side of the table, William,—I must judge for myself ;" and they were soon seated nearly opposite Vernon and Miss Douglas.

" This will just do," said Mrs. Gordon ; " aunts are proverbially lynx-eyed."

" And nieces self-willed," added Beauchamp, " if subject to much supervision ; interference is hazardous, and will often produce the contrary effect to that desired."

" I know it well, William, and you need not doubt my discretion."

In so large a company the conversation became more particular than general, and drowned by the hum of so many voices, Vernon had an opportunity of dropping his soft, honeyed speeches into the ear of Blanche Douglas, unheard by

others, the nature of which the mounting colour in her cheek alone betrayed. The pleasure derived from his witty remarks and flattering attentions being too conspicuous in her happy looks and bright sparkling eye, to admit of much doubt as to her enjoyment of his society.

After hazarding something more piquant and expressive of softer emotions than usual, Vernon happened to cast his eyes across the table, and then observed Mrs. Gordon's stern look full upon them.

"Ah!" he remarked, "your aunt appears to take a deep interest in our conversation, with that stupid fellow Beauchamp by her side, who has only language for hounds; but aunts are always troublesome, meddling old ladies, ever interfering and dictating to their unhappy nieces and nephews. I met Harry Scarsdale in town the other day (who is dependent on two tabbies of that genus), driving furiously towards the Regent's Park. 'Where now, Harry?' I enquired, 'in such hot haste?'—'To the Zoological Gardens.' 'What for; a bear or a tiger?'

—'Not the latter, there is one of that class up behind; but what I want is, an *ant eater*, to devour those confounded old relatives of mine.'"

Blanche could not suppress a laugh at this anecdote, but almost immediately after said, "My aunt, Mr. Vernon, is not of that class, I am happy to say, but one of the kindest and most indulgent relations I possess."

"Happy to hear it, Miss Douglas; there are exceptions to every rule, and Mrs. Gordon is one to the usual run of aunts, I conclude; but all old people forget 'the merry days when they were young.' By the way, I hope you will favour us with that song in the evening?"

"There are so many superior performers here to-night, that I had rather be excused," she replied.

"None who possess a sweeter voice than yourself," was the courteous rejoinder; which Blanche only noticed by a slight inclination of her head.

Mrs. Gordon had seen enough to make her feel very uncomfortable during the dinner hour,

but prudently resolving to keep her own deductions safely locked up in her own bosom, she entered into conversation with her neighbour on general subjects, to prevent any suspicion of her true thoughts being divined.

On the ladies rising to leave the dinner table, she placed her arm within her niece's, and sat down with her in the drawing-room, rather apart from the other ladies, and, notwithstanding her wise resolutions, could not forbear alluding to Vernon. "You appeared greatly pleased with Mr. Vernon's lively sallies and compliments, my dear."

"He is very entertaining," was the response.

"And very impertinent also," replied Mrs. Gordon. "His remarks about aunts, which I overheard, were particularly facetious."

"Indeed, my dear aunt, I was so annoyed by those remarks, that I scarcely spoke to him afterwards."

"You do quite right, my dear, in taking the part of those who have your true interest at heart, and defending your nearest (and I must

say it) dearest relative, whom a flippant, pert coxcomb tried to make appear ridiculous in your eyes. It is unnecessary, I hope, my dearest child, for me to put you on your guard against the advances of such frivolous, false-hearted men as Mr. Vernon or Captain Markham, however entertaining or prepossessing in manners. They are complete men of the world, wicked, witty, and worthless; and eagerly intent on marrying some heiress, to squander her money away on their own selfish gratifications. But, my dear Blanche, you will believe me when I add, that I never wish to interfere unnecessarily with your inclinations or dictate to you in the choice of a husband, although you are too young yet to think of marrying."

"Indeed, my dear aunt," replied Blanche, "I have really never thought seriously of it, and nothing would ever induce me to accept any person you disapproved of."

"Thank you, my love, and now I want you to come and stay with me a few days next week, to help me in laying out my new flower-beds;

but I promise you an exemption from any further allusion to this subject."

"Dearest aunty, I shall be too happy to come, but you must speak to my aunt Harcourt."

"Of course, my love, that I shall do at once, and name Monday." Mrs. Gordon rising, immediately approached Mrs. Harcourt, and her request was most graciously complied with.

We must now return to the dining-room, where we find the gentlemen all riding their favourite hobbies; of the elder portion some discussing politics, some agricultural, some magisterial topics; others, again, literary and scientific matters. The younger portion dilating on sporting, hunting, shooting, wine, and women. Lord Mervyn, having the worst of a fight with Sir Lionel Markham on the measures of the Government, turned suddenly to William Beauchamp, with a sneer, inquiring "When are we to have the honour of a visit from you gentlemen in scarlet, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Any day after next week, your Lordship may choose to appoint," was the quiet reply.

"And why not next week, Mr. Beauchamp? It would suit me better, as I have a large shooting party the following week."

"Our appointments, my Lord, for next week are already sent to the papers, and cannot now be altered without causing dissatisfaction, and perhaps great inconvenience to many."

"To a lot of tinkers and tailors, butchers and farmers, who the last time your hounds met at my coverts, sir, made the drives resemble a ploughed field."

"The most industrious, my Lord, at that work, were your two most staunch supporters at your son's last election for the county, Messrs. Barker and Bennet, the great brewers of Marston, whom I must leave to your Lordship to lecture on the subject, as all my remonstrances were totally unheeded."

"Well, sir," replied Lord Mervyn, "it is a great nuisance to have my drives cut to pieces, and my hares and pheasants driven all over the country by your confounded dogs."

"The remedy, my Lord," replied Beauchamp,

"lies in your own hands; you can forbid the hounds drawing your coverts at all, which is a mere form I would readily dispense with, as we seldom find a fox there."

"That is no concern of mine, Mr. Beauchamp; if foxes don't fancy my woods, I can't help their taste; they are free to come and go when they like, I suppose?"

"I wish this were the case, my Lord; but your keeper's motto is *Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*"

"He tells me, sir," replied Lord Mervyn, "that he never destroys a fox, and I believe him."

"Then who does, my Lord? since two dead foxes were found buried in the field close to your home wood, last week."

"By whom, sir? I wish to know, who dared to be prowling about my chief preserve?" enquired Lord Mervyn, becoming very excited.

"The person who found them," replied Beauchamp, very coolly, "was my whipper-in, who was sent in search of a stray hound, and called

at your keeper's house, to enquire if he had seen him, and in riding across the field, his horse stumbling over some loose earth, the man dismounted, and then he found a brace of dead foxes, recently killed, with their legs broken in traps."

"Put them there himself, I daresay," rejoined Lord Mervyn, "to accuse my men of killing them."

"That, my Lord," interposed Bob Conyers, "I'll answer for, he never did."

"And pray, who asked your opinion, Mr. Conyers?" inquired Lord Mervyn.

"I choose to express it, sir, in defence of an honest servant, who is unjustly accused," retorted Bob.

"Then, sir," replied Lord Mervyn, in a furious passion, "I neither wish for your company, Mr. Beauchamp's, his hounds, or his whippers-in at any of my coverts again."

"Glad to hear it, my Lord; an open foe is preferable to a pretended friend; and now you have taken up the cudgels against half the

county, we shall soon see who will be the first to cry, 'Hold, enough.'"

"I care neither for you, nor any of your ragamuffin followers," replied Lord Mervyn, his passion carrying him beyond all bounds.

"In which number, I suppose, I must consider myself included," exclaimed Sir Lucius Gwynne, his Welsh blood beginning to boil up.

"As you please, sir," was the rejoinder.

"Then, my Lord Mervyn," said Sir Lucius, rising from his chair, and seizing a decanter, "retract that expression, or I'll throw this bottle at your head."

"You will?"

"Yes, sir, I will—You, you upstart spawn of a lawyer's clerk, smuggled into the House of Peers, for doing the Government's dirty work, *you* call me a ragamuffin; by Jove! sir, I'll scatter your foul brains about your shoulders, if you don't beg my pardon this instant."

Tyler, who was a friend of Lord Mervyn's, whispered in his ear, "It must be done, Mervyn; pray apologise, or you must meet him, and he is a dead shot."

The crest-fallen Lord muttered some explanation.

"That won't do, sir," exclaimed Gwynne; "speak out, that all may hear."

"I did not intend to apply the term I used, to you, Sir Lucius."

"Very well, my Lord, that saves you from a broken head, or a bullet through your body this time," resuming his seat.

"Pon honour, Mervyn," said the Captain, "sorry to trouble you, but his Majesty's commission, Life Guards, and that sort of thing—Eh, you understand, my Lord? ragamuffins won't do—our fellows won't stomach that title, Mervyn."

"It was not intended for you, or them, Captain Markham," replied Lord Mervyn.

"Glad to hear it, my Lord."

"Well," interposed Vernon, "if it affords any real gratification to Lord Mervyn to know there is one ragamuffin in this room who owns to the title, I confess myself amenable to that soft impeachment; and as I have the honour of

belonging to his Lordship's political party, he will do me the favour I hope, of allowing this motto to be engraved on his banner, at his son's next election, 'Mervyn and his ragamuffins for ever!' "

"Hah, hah! Vernon! demmed good! Egad, old fellow, your wit cuts a deuced deal sharper than a small sword."

"And now," said Vernon, "as my Lord Mervyn has been favoured with divers opinions, pray may I ask, what our worthy Master of the Hounds has to say on the subject?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Beauchamp; "too much has been *said* already for a social party like this; but as holding the high position to which you have alluded, and in which I have been placed with the consent and approbation of the principal landed proprietors of this county, Lord Mervyn must be aware that something more than a verbal apology will be required for the epithet he has been rash enough to apply to the members of our hunt, whom I have the honour of so imperfectly representing."

A dead silence pervaded the room, as Beau-

champ delivered this speech, without a muscle of his face moving from excitement or anger; and at its conclusion Sir Lionel Markham observed, "You have well spoken, Beauchamp, and acted as your friends always thought you would, with forbearance and discretion; and you will find those friends ever ready to support you."

"And in that number," said Tyler, "I beg to be included; for Beauchamp is justly entitled to the gratitude of every true sportsman in this county, for his indefatigable exertions and gentlemanly conduct in the field. No one can regret more than I do the unpleasant interruption to our conviviality this evening, for which Mr. Beauchamp is in no way responsible; and I trust Lord Mervyn, now that the heat of the moment is over, will frankly acknowledge, what I am sure he now feels, regret at having used expressions so totally inapplicable to any gentleman in this room, or any member of that hunt to which I have the honour to belong."

"Mr. Tyler," said Lord Mervyn, rising, "you have only anticipated me in the expression of

sentiments which are strictly my own; and I do most truly regret having in the heat of passion so entirely forgotten myself. My most humble apologies are justly due to every gentleman here present, and particularly to our kind host, for the scene of confusion I have been the cause of introducing at his hospitable board; and the hasty and unwarrantable expression which so inadvertently escaped my lips will, I hope, be forgiven and forgotten."

Satisfaction being expressed by all at this happy termination of such serious differences, Lord Mervyn, turning to Beauchamp, requested he would name any day, the week after next, to meet at Marston Castle, as he would put off his shooting party.

"By no means, my Lord," replied Beauchamp; "disappointment to your friends may be as great as to ours; any day, therefore, in the first week of December will suit us equally well."

"Then we will say the second of that month."

"I thank you, my Lord," said Beauchamp, entering it in his pocket-book.

"And now, Mr. Beauchamp, if you and all the members of your hunt will do me the honour of breakfasting with me that morning, I shall feel that I have obtained forgiveness for the past, and I trust to merit your good opinion for the future."

"I shall have much pleasure in accepting your Lordship's invitation, which shall be communicated to all the members of our hunt," replied Beauchamp, with a low bow.

"Egad, Mervyn," remarked the Captain, "you are a demmed cantankerous fellow, sometimes, but not a bad one at heart; and I'll do myself the honour of tasting your cherry-brandy, or a glass of Maraschino, on that said second of December."

"I shall be delighted to find you approve it, Captain Markham."

These matters having been adjusted, an attempt was made at cordiality, but failed, as every man in the room knew Lord Mervyn too well to doubt his real feeling towards fox-hunters, and an adjournment to the ladies soon followed.

CHAPTER IV.

On returning to the drawing-room, Captain Markham immediately sought Miss Douglas, who was sitting with her Aunt Gordon and Constance. "Thought we had forgotten you, Mrs. Gordon, I suppose—very late, I know; but all owing to that spiteful old Mervyn—called us ragamuffins and that sort of thing — Wynne wouldn't stand it—Welsh blood up—threatened to knock his brains out with the bottle—'Pon honor, such a scene, very disagreeable indeed—Will Beauchamp pulled him up—thought he would have to fight to-morrow morning—Eh—

ah—Miss Douglas—demmit all—beg pardon, but you look like a ghost."

Mrs. Gordon's eyes were instantly turned to her niece, who was deadly pale, and appeared near fainting.

"My dearest Blanche, what is the matter? Here, my love, smell at these salts."

"A sudden faintness came over me, dear aunt, but I shall soon be better."

Conyers now came up with "Well, ladies, all's well that ends well; and, now that we are all friends again, I may just tell you what detained us so long in the dining-room,"—which he did as shortly as possible, speaking in high terms of Beauchamp's cool and gentlemanly conduct.

"Then there is to be no duel to-morrow," inquired Mrs. Gordon, anxiously.

"None, my dear Madam, I assure you, every thing is amicably settled; and, instead of fighting, Will has accepted an invitation to breakfast with Lord Mervyn on this day month."

"Are you not deceiving me, Mr. Conyers?"

"No, on my honour, Mrs. Gordon; and to satisfy you still further, I will send Beauchamp here directly, to show you the entry in his pocket-book."

As Beauchamp approached them, the colour suddenly returned to Miss Douglas's face, suffusing her cheeks and brow, which, not unnoticed by Mrs. Gordon, revealed to her a secret unknown to Blanche herself until that moment, that she loved William Beauchamp. She had long looked upon him as a dear friend, but had hitherto remained totally unconscious of any deeper feeling towards him, when the sudden revelation made by Captain Markham of his life perhaps being at stake, sent a thrilling, suffocating sensation circling round her heart, to which she had hitherto been a stranger. Her ill-concealed trepidation at his approach delightfully confirmed Mrs. Gordon in her long-indulged hopes that William Beauchamp might become the object of her niece's choice.

"William," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, as he stood before her, "I have sent for you to hear

an account from your own lips of this unpleasant *fracas* with Lord Mervyn, whom, I am told, it was your intention to challenge to-morrow morning."

For a moment Blanche's face was raised to his, to scan his looks. Their eyes met, and, by that quick, hurried glance, Beauchamp seemed entranced, riveted to the spot; for a moment the full spell of fascination was upon him, as he gazed in silent surprise on the varying colour and trembling form of Blanche Douglas.

"William!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, in a sharp tone, "what ails you to-night?—are you tipsy or crazy?"

"Neither tipsy nor crazy, dear Mrs. Gordon; but a fit of abstraction seized me; my thoughts were wandering; pray forgive me."

"A pretty confession, Mr. William, in the presence of three ladies," added Constance; "so now, to make your peace with Aunt Gordon, just have the goodness to occupy my seat till I return, and make a full confession of your wicked conduct, whilst I hear Mr. Conyers'

version of the story; we shall then know who speaks most truth; so sit down between those two ladies, who, I hope, will both in turn give you a thorough good lecture."

Beauchamp required no second invitation, and turning first to Miss Douglas, who was on his right side, said in a low tone, scarcely above a whisper, "Dear Blanche, you look pale and agitated, what has distressed you?"

"Oh, nothing now!" she replied. "I felt faint a little while ago, but dear aunty's vinaigrette"—(again applying it to her nostrils)—"has nearly revived me."

"Now, William," interposed Mrs. Gordon, "I am all impatience; pray begin, and tell me the whole truth."

"And so I will, dear madam," replied Beauchamp; "every word of it."

"Don't dear madam me, sir; your sister, Constance, like a good, dear, obedient child, does as she is bid, and calls me Aunt Gordon, and I desire you will do the same, unless you wish me to call you Mr. Beauchamp."

"Then, dear Aunt Gordon, I will give you chapter and verse of the whole conversation in the dining-room, after the ladies left, without further delay."

"Only what concerns yourself, William, and has reference to your quarrel with Lord Mervyn. I don't want to hear all the nonsense that is usually talked by gentlemen over their wine."

Beauchamp, as succinctly as possible, related what passed relative to his altercation with Lord Mervyn, and, producing his pocket-book, in which the entry of his appointment to draw the Marston coverts was written, Mrs. Gordon expressed herself satisfied with his explanation.

"Thus far," she said, "all is well; but I wish you clearly to understand, William Beauchamp, that I thoroughly disapprove of duelling. It is a cowardly, unchristian practice, adapted to heathens and atheists only, and, as such, I must exact from you a promise, that you will never again permit yourself to stand in the position you have this evening, of meditating the sacrifice

of a fellow-creature's life, to satisfy what you gentlemen call by the false name of honour."

"I hope you will acquit me of any such blood-thirsty intention," replied Beauchamp. "The greatest provocation would never induce me to take any man's life, unless in the unavoidable defence of my own."

"That's equivocal, William—"

"Then, is this plain enough? I will never deliberately fire at any opponent with the aim of shooting him."

"Oh! then, I suppose, you are to stand as his target, to be murdered in cold blood; but you are deceiving yourself, not me, William, in this fine-drawn distinction. No person has a right rashly to throw his life away, since it is God's loan, and He only has the right to dispose of it. Remember His commands on this point—'At the hands of every man's brother will I require the life of man.' Again, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath;' and there are hundreds of the same injunctions throughout the New Testament."

"I will consider well your objections, dear Aunt Gordon, although I believe you are quite right."

"Then, why hesitate to follow the promptings of your own conscience?"

"There is a listener," he whispered, "who would not be slow to avail himself of my confessions."

"Ah! I see—we will change the subject."

Vernon had slowly and stealthily approached the back of the sofa where Blanche was sitting, in the hope of overhearing the nature of her conversation with Beauchamp.

> "Aside the devil turned
> For envy, yet with jealous leer malign
> Ey'd them askance."

Leaning on the back of the sofa, Vernon now requested the honour of Miss Douglas favouring him with the song she had promised at dinner.

"I made no such promise, Mr. Vernon," was her reply, and he was again urging his suit, with flattering persuasions, when Mrs. Gordon,

seeing Blanche annoyed with his importunities, interfered, saying her niece was very far from well, and she had laid an interdiction upon her singing that evening.

"I could scarcely expect," he retorted, with a sneer, "to detach Miss Douglas from such delightful society."

"Except by the aid of an *Ant-eater*," replied Mrs. Gordon; on which Vernon turned abruptly away.

Soon after, he was engaged in an animated conversation with Captain Markham, the nature of which will transpire in the following colloquy.

"What makes you look so demmed pleasant to-night—claret sour, or what? with that vinegar countenance?"

"That old aunt's enough to put any man out of temper," replied Vernon; "and that fellow, Beauchamp, thinking they are going to have it all their own way with the heiress."

"Eh! 'pon honour—what d'ye mean?"

"I have been watching Beauchamp very intently since he joined her on the sofa, and her

looks, when he ventured on some soft speech, betrayed the nature of it; in fact, I believe he is making up to her."

"Well, why shouldn't he? She is fair game to any man to try for, without poaching on your ground. Demmit, Vernon, you seem to think no fellow has a right to speak to her but yourself. Eh, 'pon my soul, that's a good joke!—and, if that's your humour, just give me leave to observe, my fine fellow, that Ned Markham considers he has quite as good a chance for the heiress as Dick Vernon."

"Oh! certainly, a much better one," replied Vernon, with a sneer. "Heir to a baronetcy—Life Guardsman—fine figure — lots of small talk, and all that sort of thing; but I hate Will Beauchamp, and intend to pick a quarrel with him, to get him out of my way. Will you be my second?"

"No, Richard Vernon, I will not; that's plain enough, I suppose." With which the Captain walked away.

A voice from behind whispered in his ear,

"Don't despair, Dick, I will supply Edward's place;" and turning round, he confronted Miss Markham.

"You my second, Selina?"

"And why not? Put on Ned's dress, pair of false moustaches, and all that sort of thing —just do, 'pon honour — masculine enough, eh?"

"Decidedly the latter," remarked Vernon, with a sneer; "but, I fear, you would load my pistol with powder only."

"Oh no, Dick!—but in place of ball I should load with *dice*. No fear then of missing your victim. You are a deadly hand with them, Richard Vernon."

"Your remarks are so eccentric and ambiguous sometimes," replied Vernon, "that it would puzzle a philosopher to interpret them."

"Indeed, Mr. Richard Vernon, your usual sharp wit is at fault, eh? Then I will leave you to guess my meaning, with this little piece of advice: don't assume the part of assassin and bully by plotting against the life of an inno-

cent man, who is your superior in every point but one—villainy!"

"Oh, indeed, Miss Markham, you are in a particularly facetious humour this evening; but suppose I were to insinuate that a certain very gifted and highly accomplished young lady thought more deeply than people imagine, of a certain person, whose great recommendation lies in chasing those poor devils of foxes to death, and whose proficiency in dog language, to the exclusion of every other, is notorious."

"You may insinuate what you please, Mr. Vernon: but *facts* are stubborn things, and two or three little transactions of yours have come to my knowledge, which shall be certainly disclosed, when Mr. Vernon dares to apply any insulting terms either to William Beauchamp or your humble servant;" with which, making him a low curtsey, she haughtily turned on her heel.

"Ah, I see," muttered Vernon to himself, "that d——d fool, her brother, has been letting the cat out of the bag, so now I must try

another game ;" with which purpose, he crossed the room and joined Mrs. Harcourt, whose glances towards the sofa, where Mrs. Gordon, Blanche, and Beauchamp were sitting, revealed the nature of her thoughts.

" Well, Mrs. Harcourt," he enquired, noticing her dissatisfied looks, " have I misrepresented matters in that quarter ?"

" A little exaggerated, I should hope, though not perhaps intentional ; but Mrs. Gordon is well aware of our views with regard to her niece." The latter part of her speech was delivered as a check to Mr. Vernon's future attentions to Blanche, which Mrs. Harcourt had observed more than once before, and particularly at dinner that evening,—so that the crafty plotter received a rebuke where he least expected one.

Whilst we have been relating these conversations, the company had been enlivened by music and singing, the principal performers being, Miss Caroline Markham, Constance, and two Misses Rolleston, with Captain Markham and Robert Conyers ; and the evening thus passed pleasantly

away, without further incidents, until the carriages were announced.

During their drive home, Constance rallied her brother on his abstraction, saying, "We have gone at least three miles, William, and three words have not passed your lips; what are you thinking of, my sapient brother?"

"Of nothing particular, Con, dear."

"Yes, William, you are; (excuse my rudeness in contradicting you;) and I will tell you the subject of your meditations, if you promise to confess whether I have guessed rightly or not."

"Well, dear Con, what is it then?"

"Blanche Douglas."

Beauchamp was silent for a moment, then added.

"Yes, Constance, your guess is right; but there is nothing very particular in my thinking about Blanche, of whom I so often think, and her future prospects in life; you know the interest I have long taken in her, and my brotherly affection; she is to me a second sister."

"Yes, dear William, but in that relation she

cannot much longer stand to *you*, although I hope she may to *me*."

"That, I fear, can never be, dear Constance."

"And why not, my own true kind-hearted brother?"

"The rich heiress, when once launched on the world, and surrounded by the titled, the rich and the gay, trying for her hand, will soon forget the humble companion of her earlier and happier years."

"Never, William, believe me, if I know her as I ought to do; although so young, she thinks deeply, judges carefully, and loves, where she does love, intensely: and of this I am quite convinced, that an impression upon her heart, once made, will never be obliterated."

"Well, my dear enthusiastic sister, time is said to prove the constancy of faithful love."

"William," she said, "will you answer me one question, sincerely and confidentially—(for you know me too well to believe I ever would betray your confidence)—do you love Blanche as a sister only?"

"Until this night, dear Con, I believed I did regard her in that light only; but now, my feelings have undergone a change, would that they never had!"

"Why say this, my own darling brother, and in so sad a tone?"

"Because from this hour they must be suppressed, if not extinguished. What! Will Beauchamp a fortune-hunter! never," he replied with emphasis; "perish the thought!"

"And perish thus," added Constance, "the happy dreams, the brightening hopes, of that dear confiding girl, who thinks she has found a responding pulse to her own feelings in the breast of William Beauchamp."

"Constance," exclaimed her brother in surprise, "what does all this mean?"

"Simply this, William; I know the language of the eyes, the looks of love; and if the latter were not exhibited to me this night by Blanche Douglas, when Markham spoke of your quarrel with Lord Mervyn, I know nothing of womankind."

"Oh, say not so, Constance."

"It is said and done," she replied; "the die is cast: the happiness or misery of her you love now rests in your keeping, to whom she has entrusted, though not yet revealed, her life's dearest treasure. Now, William, we are just at home; and remember, the conversation we have had this evening must never escape your lips, even to our nearest and dearest friends."

"Of that there is little fear; honour and delicacy will keep my lips hermetically sealed on this subject; but beware, my dear Constance, *you* do not compromise your brother.

"As soon, dear William, should I compromise myself."

Mr. Beauchamp and Sir Francis had retired to rest before the return of William and his sister, but Miss Raymond awaited in the drawing-room, in the expectation of receiving a true and particular account of that evening's proceedings.

The appointment for the next morning having been advertised for Barton Court, the seat of Sir Lionel Markham, the worthy baronet threw

open his doors to all comers,—a substantial breakfast being laid out for their discussion; after which, punctual to the time, half-past ten, Charley made his appearance with the pack, which soon after trotted off to the home wood, where an abundance of foxes was provided for their entertainment. The multiplicity of these animals, however, proved a bar to much sport, from their continual interference with each other's business; but after an hour's rattling work in covert, one of these gentlemen of the brush thought to sneak quietly away from the din ringing in his ears; and, taking advantage of a hedge-row to screen him from observation, faced the open. Charles's quick eye detected his foe slinking along, until, jumping the fence two fields off, he gave one hasty look behind him, and then disappeared. "Ah, old fellow, you think you've done the trick cleverly?—just the ticket, namesake," he was muttering to himself, when an old master of harriers came up.

"Well, Charley, just in *my* way this—round and round."

"Yes, sir, we have had enough of that fun, and now you shall have something in *ours*;" when, putting his fingers to his ear, he sent forth a scream, which nearly unhorsed the thistle whipper.

"Gone away!" screamed Charles again.

"Where? where?" exclaimed Newman Butler, "I don't see him."

"But I did, sir, and hope never to see him again until he is brought to hand; now for the cobbler's wax, sir,"—as the hounds came tearing out of covert, and settled down to the scent. "Give Foreman his head, sir, and come along; we've got them all to ourselves." Saying which he cleared the first fence, with a yawning ditch on the other side.

"All right, sir; come along!" cried Charley, as looking back he saw Foreman blundering on his nose, with his master clinging round his neck. "Pick him up, sir, and put more powder in next time."

For five-and-twenty minutes Charley had it all his own way; and so great was the pace,

that the hounds ran into their fox before he could reach the next covert. Sir Francis, with his arm in a sling, rode furiously throughout this quick burst, and was one of the first up with Will Beauchamp, Sir Lucius, and Tyler.

"Pretty thing, indeed!" exclaimed the baronet. "Well done, Charley."

"Not much for me to do, Sir Francis," replied Charles, touching his cap, "except going as straight and fast as I ever rode in my life."

"Just treat us to another of the same sort; and here, Charley"—putting a sovereign into his hand—"I'll double it if you do."

Will Beauchamp waited until Sir Lionel and his father came up, when the fox was thrown to the hounds, and a discussion took place as to the next draw. "There is a bit of nice lying in the gorse on Brendon Down, sir," suggested Charley to his master; "just suit the ladies and Sir Francis."

"And so it will, Charley."

"Well, William," enquired Sir Lionel, "where now?"

"Brendon Gorse holds a fox, I think, sir; a gallop over the open will suit the ladies better than tearing through these blackthorn fences."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Selina Markham; "who says you are not a ladies' man, Will Beauchamp? I am tattered and torn, but not forlorn, from riding a race with Dick Vernon, and beating him too, at the expense of half my skirt."

"Really, Selina," exclaimed her father, "you had better adopt skins and jack-boots at once."

"I have done it already, daddy dear!" she replied, laughing, and patting her boot with her riding-whip.

"Oh, you hoyden!" laughed Sir Lionel, "what next?"

"Don't exactly know, papa, after riding over Dick Vernon, his horse, and a five-barred gate at one swoop."

"The devil she did!" remarked Sir Francis; "that beats Leicestershire hollow."

"And a demmed scurvy trick to play a fallow who was politely stooping to open the gate for you," put in the captain.

"Think so, Ned? 'pon honour, eh! Now for a scamper on the open; come on, Will Beauchamp, while my blood is up!" saying which, she cantered off towards the downs.

Before throwing the hounds into the gorse, at Will Beauchamp's request, the horsemen ranged themselves in line, to prevent the fox breaking towards the valley, an extent of open downs stretching for several miles in the opposite direction. A brace of foxes were on foot directly, one breaking through the horsemen, with the body of the pack on his scent, and just emerging from the gorse, where a rate from Charley stopped them in a moment, and they were immediately capped by William Beauchamp on to the line of the other, which had gone straight away at the right point.

"Hold hard one minute, gentlemen!" shouted Beauchamp; "let them get their heads well down first, then ride as hard as you please." But none heeded him, every man going off at score, and leaving the hounds to get together as they could, threading their way with incon-

ceivable dexterity through nearly two hundred horses, without a hound being disabled. The pack got together like a flash of lightning, and took up the running at such a terrific pace, that in a few minutes, they were clear away from all interference,—the hardest riders being unable to live with them. In five minutes more, in ascending some rising ground, the hounds fairly beat every horse, and in another five minutes, they run into their fox on the open down, not an individual being within a mile of them at the finish.

Sir Francis and Will Beauchamp rode side by side through the burst. "Well, Sir Francis," remarked the latter, "they are putting their best legs foremost now, and beating us hollow."

"Gad, Beauchamp! they are flying instead of running. I never could have believed it possible those big bony hounds could slip away in that fashion."

"Power and speed together, Sir Francis," replied Beauchamp, "that has been our object in breeding hounds."

"And that you have succeeded to the utmost, no man can doubt who rides after them to-day," rejoined his companion.

The delight of Mr. Beauchamp, senior, when arriving on the scene, may be more easily imagined than described. Pulling off his hat, and wiping the perspiration trickling from his head down to his neckcloth, "Well, Burnett," he asked, puffing and blowing from exertion, "does this suit you?"

"Yes, my old friend, although a trifle too fast."

"Glad to hear you are pleased at last—said they couldn't run away from you—what d'ye think now, Burnett?"

"Beaten, sir, beaten, I confess. By Jove! sir, this is Newmarket work."

"Ay, Burnett, and I'll back five or ten couple of those hounds against any Newmarket horse of the present day, over six miles of turf."

"And I believe," added Sir Francis, "you would win the wager."

Selina and Constance, in company with Bob

Conyers, now reached the spot, the last ceremonies being delayed until their arrival, when Beauchamp presented the brush to Miss Markham, saying the fox had been selected for the ladies' especial amusement, and hoped they had enjoyed their gallop.

"You entered beautifully for the petticoats, William Beauchamp, and we never enjoyed such a gallop before—have we, Constance?"

"Oh, no," she exclaimed, "Selina and myself raced the whole distance, leaving dozens behind."

"'Pon honour, I am afraid, got a bad noser in trying to beat us," laughed his sister. "Narcissus put his foot in a rut, and oh, demmit, what a roll he gave his master, the Lifeguardsman, going down the hill—thought he'd never have done turning over.—'Hurt?' I cried out, as we passed him. 'Eh! aw! 'pon my soul, can't tell yet.' 'Then when you've found out, let me know'—but here he comes to answer the question."

Roars of laughter followed Miss Markham's

description of her brother's spill, which had not subsided when he arrived. "Well, Ned," enquired his sister, "have you found out yet whether you are hurt or not?"

"Demmed stiff somewhere," replied the Captain.

"'Pon honour, where?" cried Selina, choking with laughter at his grotesque appearance, with his coat split entirely up his back, and his hat crushed to pieces. "A fox had a wound, but he couldn't tell where—is that your case, Neddy, dear?" she enquired, in a pitying tone.

Roars of merriment again burst forth.

"Eh! aw! demmit! what are all you fellows laughing at? can't see the joke."

"Demmed surprised if you could," added his sister.

"Really, Selina," exclaimed Sir Lionel, "you are too bad, and if you don't behave better in the hunting-field, I shall not allow you to meet the hounds again."

"Don't be ill-tempered, daddy, dear," she said, coaxingly, riding up, and putting her hand

on his shoulder. "I enjoy a bit of fun, or a good run, as well as you do, my dear dad."

"You are too witty by half, my dear," replied Sir Lionel.

"Then I'll give the spare half to Edward, papa, will that do?"

"Incorrigible!" exclaimed her father in despair. "Will you lecture her a little, Sir Francis?"

"Rather be excused, Sir Lionel, as I have an idea she would give me a thorough good lathering in return. But now, what's the next move?"

"Home, I should think; but what says Will Beauchamp?"

"We think of travelling in that direction," replied the master huntsman, "seeing we are now eighteen miles from the kennels."

"Of course you do," added Bob Conyers; "I'd never risk the spoiling such a day's sport as this by drawing again. There are some fellows who hunt by the day, and don't know what to do with themselves until the day is

over, which puts me in mind of an answer given by Lord Mervyn to a gentleman who asked him for a day's shooting. 'Not an hour's sir,' was the reply, and a fair rebuke; for a good shot in half-an-hour would bag more game in my lord's preserves, than he could within a week in common shooting. Sport cannot be measured by time, that's my idea of it."

"And a very correct one, Bob," replied Sir Francis; "I have enjoyed these fifteen minutes over the turf at this splitting pace, more, ten times more, than I should the longest woodland run."

"Come along then, Burnett," exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, and their horses' heads were turned homewards. As the Squire moved off, Sir Lionel shouted, "Mind you dine with us to-morrow, Beauchamp, with Will and Constance."

"Not likely to forget that, Markham," was the response.

On their ride home, they met Newman But-

ler galloping towards them, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"Eh! well! Will Beauchamp, what have you done with him?" enquired the Master of the Harriers.

"Carrying him home, Newman," pointing to the hounds with his whip.

"Ah! indeed! too fast for old Foreman; couldn't hold the pace, obliged to give in."

"You are not singular, Newman," replied Will Beauchamp; "scores of others were told off as well as yourself, and are riding at this moment dispersed over the downs."

CHAPTER V.

The dinner party at Burton Court the next evening consisted of nearly the same individuals we have before described as dining at Mr. Harcourt's, with the exception of Lord Mervyn's family, who sent excuses; in whose places we must substitute Newman Butler and Mr. Compton of Brockley Park (the other member for that division of the county, also a great game preserver), with Mrs. Compton, a remarkably fine handsome woman of about five and thirty, who had presented him with a goodly array of young olive branches around his table, the

eldest of whom, a boy of fourteen, was then at Eton.

Under the presidency of Sir Lionel, at his own festive board, backed by the old Squire of Bampton, formality was obliged to throw off her cold, freezing aspect, and even Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt thawed under the genial influence induced by the warmhearted and jovial hospitality of the old baronet, now in his seventieth year, whose still tall stately form, measuring over six feet in height, and fine open countenance, beaming with hilarity and good humour, presented the beau ideal of a true English gentleman, "one of the olden time." The Squire of Bampton, although not so tall as his friend and cotemporary, was cast nearly in the same mould, and very closely resembled Sir Lionel in disposition also.

Notwithstanding the tendency in this all-assuming age to detract from the manners and merits of the old school of *squirearchy*, it would be well did the rising generation resemble more in essential points that which has passed away.

What are the forward, flippant manners of the young men of the present day, and especially their pert behaviour to ladies, in comparison with the refined, respectful, and courtly demeanour of their fathers? The antics and airs of apes, or of a linen draper's assistant, without even his politeness, instead of the conduct and bearing of gentlemen; and their language and conversation with ladies, what are they but a positive insult to any woman of chaste ideas? Compare also a dinner party in the present age, with one of the olden time. Now, all is ostentation and display, with their French cooks, French dishes, Swiss valets, and gentlemanlike butlers! No man thinks of committing such a solecism now, as asking his neighbour to take wine—formerly a medium of introduction to those unknown to each other; but at a large party in these days, it is one servant's occupation to go the round of the table, pouring champagne and other wines into the company's glasses. There is a total absence of that genuine hospitality, the characteristic of the olden time.

No sirloin of beef smokes on the board, but in place of the old substantial dishes — pâtés, cotelets, fricassées à la mode française, are handed round—foreign fashions predominate even in our very language, which is now deemed so poor and inexpressive as to require French phrases to explain its meaning.

Turn we now in retrospective view to the festive board in bygone days, with the old portly butler, who has grown grey-headed in the service, and the Johnny Raws of the village converted into respectful and attentive serving men, whose interests and happiness appeared to be identified with the members of their master's house.

Lady Markham, having marshalled her guests and assigned partners to each, as she deemed most appropriate, reserving Sir Francis to herself, left the junior part to their own arrangements, with the exception of Miss Douglas, whom she consigned to her son, the captain, much to the annoyance of Vernon, who was just offering his arm, Will Beauchamp feeling himself imperatively called upon to hand in

Selina Markham, out of respect to her father, and the others not standing on much ceremony in making their selection.

The long dining-table glittered with massive silver plates and dishes and huge branching candlesticks with wax lights, the viands also being of the substantial order, and entirely of home manufacture or produce of the Barton Court domain, from the sirloin of beef to the two couples of woodcocks which occupied one dish in the third course, with jellies, creams, tarts, puddings (new college especially), and other kinds of confectionary from the housekeeper's room. The wines (a choice selection from the best vintages) were the product of foreign and warmer climes; but two large flagons of home-brewed ale and home-pressed cider, of bright and sparkling amber hue, graced the board, to which Newman Butler directed an enquiring look. "Ah, Butler!" exclaimed his host, observing his glance in that direction, "there is something there which I think will suit your palate."

"No doubt, Sir Lionel, some of the best."

"Then taste and try, Newman, before you buy.—John," turning to the old butler, "a tumbler of your old ale to Mr. Butler."

"Yes, Sir Lionel;" and the next moment a tall beaker, frothed to the top, was handed by the old man, who stood by Butler, salver in hand, to watch its effect.

"Excellent, indeed," ejaculated Butler, as he returned the emptied glass; "sherry or madeira can't beat that, Sir Lionel."

"Glad you like it, Newman."

"He is a good judge of that beverage," remarked Conyers. "And now, John, I'll trouble you for a glass of the same."

Similar requests followed from other quarters, with which the old butler was highly delighted. The dinner-hour was passing pleasantly, though leisurely, away, Selina entertaining her neighbour, William Beauchamp, with many witty remarks in a low key, lest they might be overheard by her mamma, of whom alone she stood in some kind of awe. But Richard Vernon,

who had seized upon the chair next Miss Douglas, watching her glances across the table to Beauchamp and his partner, resolved to have his revenge for her distant behaviour to himself.

"Miss Markham and Mr. Beauchamp appear mutually pleased with each other," he remarked; "in fact, her whispering speeches, and furtive glances towards Lady Markham, betray the nature of their conversation; don't you think so, Miss Douglas?"

"I really do not know to what you allude, Mr. Vernon."

"None are so blind as those who will not see," was the pointed reply.

"I can see nothing in Selina's conduct to-night different to what it generally is," she answered, in rather an indignant tone.

"Oh, indeed! Then, I suppose, you are also not aware of that which is the common topic of conversation in well-informed circles, Mr. William Beauchamp's unequivocal attentions to Miss Markham?"

The colour rose suddenly to Blanche's face, and was as suddenly succeeded by a death-like pallor, of which being herself aware, she seized a glass of wine in her right hand, without being scarcely conscious of what she did, and swallowed the contents. Vernon watched her confusion with diabolical delight, adding, "My abrupt revelation has caused quite an unexpected exhibition of surprise on the part of Miss Douglas, but I suppose the news has not travelled quite so far as Throseby Hall."

"Nor anywhere else than through your own imagination, probably, Mr. Vernon;" with which she turned away, directing some observation to Captain Markham, and would not again notice anything addressed to her by Vernon.

On the retirement of the ladies to the drawing-room, Constance, taking Blanche's arm, inquired what fresh impertinence Vernon had been guilty of, having observed them sparring at dinner, which called up again the blush on her friend's cheek.

"My dear Constance, he told me that your

brother was seriously attached, if not engaged, to Selina Markham, and that everybody knew it, except myself."

"False, treacherous villain!" indignantly exclaimed Constance; "how dare he utter such a libel on my dear William? He in love with Selina!—heaven forefend!"

"But, perhaps, he may be attached to her, without entrusting you with his secrets," added Blanche.

"No, Blanche, that is impossible."

"But why is it impossible, dear Constance, can you tell me?"

"Yes, dear girl, I can; because I know he loves another—the very opposite in every respect to Miss Markham."

"Oh! who can that happy person be?" inquired Blanche, with a deep-drawn sigh. "Tell me, dear Constance, tell me her name!"

"I fear I have already said too much, dear Blanche; for William's secret is known to me alone, and I dare not divulge it."

"Oh, Constance!" whispered the poor girl,

in an agony of suspense, "pray, tell me, dearest Constance!—your secret shall never pass my lips; on my honour, nothing shall wring it from me!"

"You may guess, dear Blanche, but I dare not tell you the name. Yet," putting her lips close to her ear, she whispered, "the person is in this room."

"Caroline?" inquired Blanche.

"No."

"Miss Raymond?"

"Certainly not."

"Then it must be one of the Misses Rolleston?"

"Neither of them, my dear. Try again."

"Miss Wynne?"

"Very complimentary to William's taste, Blanche; but you must be quite sure she is not the object of his choice."

"Who, then, can it be, Constance, as there is only Aunt Gordon and myself left, of the unmarried ladies, in this room?"

"Most likely Aunt Gordon, my love," replied

her friend, looking slyly and archly in her face ; " my brother, you know, is always very attentive to her."

" Oh, nonsense, Constance ! you are joking now, and laughing to think me so credulous."

" I never was more serious in my life, Blanche ; the choice rests between Aunt Gordon and yourself. I must not compromise myself by saying more, except that, however amiable, I know William would never marry a widow. But here comes Selina."

" Well, children," she exclaimed, " what treason are you two girls concocting by yourselves in this snug corner ? Plotting how you can be revenged on that arch-fiend, Dick Vernon, for his insolent behaviour to Blanche at dinner ? What was he saying, my dear, to cause such angry looks to flash from those soft, dove-like eyes ?"

" His remarks are so impertinent sometimes, that I cannot refrain, Selina, from exhibiting resentment."

" And quite proper, too, my dear girl ; it is

very necessary for our sex to show men that thus far they may go, but no farther. Want of dignity and self-respect will always encourage such fops as Vernon to become troublesome, if not something more; so let him know, for the future, that he is to keep at a respectful distance."

"That, I hope, he knows already," replied Blanche.

"So much the better, dear; don't spare him, for you may rest assured he will not spare you."

Meanwhile, the dining-room rung with the cheerful voices of the old baronet's companions, who, under the good-humoured presidency of their warm-hearted host (no Lord Mervyn being present to damp their conviviality), indulged in their after-dinner jocularity without restraint. The last day's sport was run over again by the two veterans, and the arrangements for the ensuing week canvassed.

"I think," observed Mr. Compton, "it is my turn next, Mr. Beauchamp; we have plenty of foxes as well as pheasants, and Mrs. Compton

and the children are quite impatient to see the hounds again."

"Whenever you like, Compton," replied the old 'squire, "after next week. Take your choice of the three days, Monday, Thursday, or Saturday."

"The last, then," said Compton, "as I promised to let some friends know the first regular fixture for our place."

"Well, Compton," said Conyers, "I wish your keeper would give Lord Mervyn the receipt for preserving foxes and pheasants under the same crust. His won't keep together; yours always do, and both last good till the end of the season."

"Everything depends on the seasoning supplied to the head-cook," replied Compton, good-humouredly, "which I never spare. In fact, he would get a peppering himself, if foxes and pheasants were not found in the same covert, and both good of their kind."

"I never tasted a roast fox," said Conyers, "although I have heard of a fool who once

ordered one for dinner. But I'll bear testimony to the flavour of your pheasants; and the hounds seem to relish your foxes, too, by the way they so pertinaciously follow in their wake across country. Why, let me see, or think, rather, of my memorandum-book for last season, which records the eating of nine foxes out of ten, from Compton's little spinnies, and all dispatched after capital runs—pretty good for a game-preserver, and no fox-hunter! Well, Compton, you are one of the right sort, barring an error in your education; but when your son and heir comes home for the Christmas holidays, I have promised Mrs. Compton to give him a few preliminary lessons in the art of horsemanship, and I hope he'll turn out a fox-hunter, that's all the harm I shall do to him. And he won't make the worse statesman for having a knowledge of the wiles of Charles James Fox—Sir Francis, there, is an example of that sort, who can take the lead in the House of Commons, as well as over the pastures of Leicestershire—egad, Sir, rode two of the quickest things we

have had this season, only yesterday, with his arm in a sling!"

"Why, Conyers!" exclaimed Sir Francis, "you are becoming personally offensive to-night —that comes of mixing malt liquor and wine together—and the result is, that you are running riot most wondrously, and require the lash for babbling."

"Ah, very likely, Burnett, the old saying, 'When the wine is in, the wit comes out,' or, rather, in old Horace's version, 'The truth comes out.'"

"Talking of malt liquor," said Fred Beauchamp, "puts me in mind of a little scrimmage yesterday, whilst the hounds were running in covert, between that vendor of swipes, Brewer Suction, and Lawyer Dryasdust. The origin of their differences I could not ascertain, but something about a bill of costs; high words ensued, the lawyer applying some insulting language to the brewer about hog's-wash and tobacco-juice used in his beer. Old Suction's dander was up in a minute, and in return he called Dryasdust a

cheating, rascally quill-driver. Retorts, anything but courteous, followed from both parties, when the brewer's wrath burst forth like the froth from one of his newly-filled beer-barrels, and he rode at the lawyer, double-thong in hand, challenging him to a tournament on horseback, or a fight on foot. 'Form a ring, gentlemen,' cried Farmer Turvill, 'let 'em have it out—I'll back the brewer.' 'Two to one on the lawyer,' shouted Williams, the sporting Vet. 'I'll be bottle-holder,' cried a third.' 'Come on,' roared Suction, 'I'll make thy hide rattle like one of thy villainous parchments.'

"'No, gentlemen,' said the lawyer, 'I scorn to touch with my little finger such a low blackguard.'

"'Low blackguard am I?' quoth Suction. 'Then take that for thy insolence;' with which he dealt Dryasdust such a wipe across the shoulders with his heavy crop, that he made him twist again. 'A fight, a fight,' arose on all sides, 'have it out.' 'I won't fight,' screamed the lawyer; 'my weapon is the pen, and I'll bring

an action for assault and battery.' 'In for a penny, in for a pound,' shouted Suction, and at him he went, laying it on thick and fast, until the lawyer fairly bolted, and galloped from the field, the brewer after him, Dryasdust keeping a retreating fire of words, with 'heavy damages, bill of costs, five hundred pounds, d— him, ruin him.'"

"This brings to my recollection," said Vernon, "a running fight I witnessed in Town, last summer, between two Jew boys, one following the other, and belabouring him with his clothes-bag, the pursued crying out appealingly to the passers-by, 'Ain't he spiteful, now, ain't he spiteful?' pointing to his nasal organ, dropping blood, as he bustled along the street."

The introduction of coffee was a hint to Sir Lionel and his friends that their presence was now required in the drawing-room, which failed not in being obeyed, deep potations not then being the fashion.

Constance and Blanche were seated together on an ottoman sipping their tea, when William

Beauchamp joined them, a seat being offered by his sister between them, which he gladly accepted. Old John, the butler, had just entered the room; and, in passing with several smoking cups on his tray, piping hot from the house-keeper's room, his foot caught in the leg of a chair, and he would have precipitated the scalding liquid over Blanche Douglas, but for the quick eye and rapid movement of William Beauchamp, who sprang up before her, and received the contents over his own person.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried the old man. "To think that I should have done such a thing to you, Mr. William."

"Better to me than Miss Douglas, my old friend."

"But you must be dreadfully scalded, sir," he added, "all through my awkwardness! "What can I do?"

"Oh, William!" exclaimed Constance, jumping up to his aid. "Are you much hurt?"

"No, no, dear, not in the least. My best front and waistcoat are alone a little damaged."

"More than that, I expect, my boy," said Sir Lionel, walking hastily up. "Come with me, Will, directly, and change your things," and he followed his host from the room.

Blanche neither spoke nor rose from her seat; but her quivering lip and flushed face betrayed her emotion, which did not pass unnoticed by Mrs. Harcourt, whose attention was directed to the scene. But Constance (with a woman's quick perception of her feelings), standing before her friend to screen her from observation, stooped as if to examine her dress, and whispered, "Don't be alarmed, dear Blanche—all eyes are upon us —my brother is not hurt."

"Oh, how kind of him to save me at his own risk!" she replied. "I am sure he must be dreadfully scalded."

"Oh, no, my dear girl, I hope the tea was not very hot."

In a few minutes, Sir Lionel returned to the room, when Vernon asked, in a sneering tone, if Mr. William Beauchamp was so seriously injured as to require surgical assistance.

"Not that, Sir," replied Sir Lionel, indignantly, "although his chest is like a raw piece of beef; but, thank God, he saved Blanche Douglas, poor child, from what would have been a serious injury to her fair skin, through the blundering of that old fool John."

"What a fuss about a cup of tea," again sneered Vernon.

"Hark'e, Sir," said the Baronet, now thoroughly roused; "no more of your sneers, or I'll throw the next relay that comes into your lap, and you'll hop higher than ever you did in a hornpipe."

"Never perpetrated such a monstrosity, Sir Lionel; that dance only suits such high-flyers as Miss Selina."

"I'll make you dance to *some purpose* presently," muttered that mischievous young lady to herself, with which intent she approached Mr. Vernon, who was lolling in an easy chair, and began thanking him, in mocking terms, for his polite allusion to her gymnastic exercises, at the same time beckoning the servant, who held

the salver, to take an empty cup she held in her hand. But on his approaching with two other full cups on the tray, with a touch of her elbow, the contents were adroitly tipped over into her persecutor's lap. In an instant he was on his legs, hopping and jumping about with the pain.

"Hang it, madam," he exclaimed in a furious passion; "these practical jokes of yours are intolerable."

"Oh! la!" she exclaimed; "what a fuss Mr. Vernon makes about a cup of tea."

"Demmit, Vernon, you can hop a bit, though; thought you were trying an Irish jig."

"And yet," said Selina, "the tea could not be very hot, having been in the room ever since Mr. Beauchamp left it."

"Disagreeable, though, 'pon honour," remarked the Captain. "So come along, Dick, I'll rig you out."

As they quitted the room, Lady Markham severely reprimanded Selina for her conduct.

"Dear Mamma," pleaded the young lady, "don't be angry; if my brother does not choose

to protect me from the impertinence of that flippant puppy, I will not allow him to insult me, as he does other ladies, with impunity."

William Beauchamp, at this moment, entered the room, arrayed in one of the Baronet's waistcoats, which excited the risibility of his cousin Fred.

"Well, Will, you look like a second Falstaff; 'hang a calf-skin round his recreant limbs!'"

"Fortunate, my boy, all are not of such spare dimensions as yourself," replied Beauchamp; "even the Captain's would not fit, but in Sir Lionel's vestment, although a little too long, I feel myself a person of much greater importance than I did half-an-hour ago."

"And so you are, Will,—look the baronet all over."

"You cannot pay me a higher compliment, Fred;" with which he passed over to where Constance, Blanche, and Conyers were sitting.

"How do you feel now, Beauchamp?" asked the latter.

"Quite well, Bob, thank you; it raised a bit

of a rash, nothing more. But I fear," he said, addressing Blanche, "you were frightened by my awkwardness in nearly falling upon you; but the whole thing was so sudden, that I could scarcely keep my footing."

"I was not alarmed on my own account," she replied, timidly; "but I am sure you are hurt, in protecting me, more than you choose to confess."

"Indeed, I am not," he said; and lowering his voice to a whisper, added, "willingly, most willingly, dear Blanche, would I risk my life to protect you from harm;" which caused the blood to rush to her very forehead, so deeply did these words strike to her heart. Mrs. Harcourt's keen glance noticed Beauchamp's impressive manner to her niece, as well as her too evident confusion at his words, and walking across to where they were sitting, begged Constance and Blanche to sing the last duet they had been practising together. Refusal was out of the question; and as the two girls rose to go to the piano, Mrs. Harcourt detained Beauchamp

by asking his advice about her pet spaniel, but, in reality, to detach him from her niece, and try to discover his true feelings towards her. After the dog's malady had been discussed, she asked, "Don't you think Blanche very much improved in her singing, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Yes, indeed, she is," was the frank reply; "she sings charmingly, and is a sweet, unaffected girl."

"She must not now be treated as a girl any longer, Mr. Beauchamp, having nearly reached her eighteenth year; and she is to be introduced, as I dare say you have heard, at our next Christmas ball; and considering her position, fortune, and personal attractions, Mr. Harcourt and myself are justified, I think, in expecting that she will form some high matrimonial connection."

"There is no station, save one, to which Miss Douglas may not aspire," replied Beauchamp, in the same quiet, indifferent tone of voice.

"We certainly shall not give our consent to her marrying any person who has not an equi-

valent in fortune or in rank; but I believe she is already attached to her cousin, Lord Malcolm, whom we are expecting at Throseby, next month."

Her eyes were riveted on Beauchamp as she uttered this last sentence, but a steady, firm look was all she could discover there — no embarrassment was perceptible; only a slight curl on his upper lip told Mrs. Harcourt, as plainly as words, that William Beauchamp thoroughly understood her. She was not, however, aware of a fact, known as yet to himself and one other person only, that Lord Malcolm's affections had been given to another.

Relieved from Mrs. Harcourt's catechising, and roused by her insinuation, Beauchamp took his revenge by immediately joining Blanche and Constance, who now left the piano, and he attached himself to them for the remainder of the evening.

On returning to the drawing-room, Vernon remarked this happy party, and again began his comments to Mrs. Harcourt on Beauchamp's attentions to her niece.

" Did you notice Miss Douglas," he asked, " when the accident happened, by that old stupid man upsetting the tea ?"

" Yes," she said, " Mr. Vernon, I did; and any young girl, when suddenly frightened, as she must have been, would naturally change colour and feel agitated; even at my age, such an occurrence would have made me nervous. But Mr. Beauchamp has been enlightened by me, since you left the room, as to our expectations with regard to my niece, and the communication was received with the most perfect indifference, so that I am quite satisfied his attentions are merely those of a neighbour to one he has known from childhood; particularly as I informed him, also, of Blanche's attachment to her cousin, Lord Malcolm, which did not excite the least surprise."

" Well, Mrs. Harcourt, although you may be satisfied, I am not."

" And pray, Mr. Vernon, may I ask, why you take such an extraordinary interest in my niece ?"

"Simply, madam, because I should be sorry to see her thrown away upon such a clod of a fox-hunter as Will Beauchamp."

"Indeed, Mr. Vernon, I ought to feel much obliged by your anxiety for her welfare; but I think some refined young gentlemen might take a lesson from the *clod*, Will Beauchamp, in his respectful attentions to ladies; he, at least, never forgets what is due to our sex."

Vernon was stunned by this retort, and did not again renew the subject; but exasperated now against Mrs. Harcourt, as well as her niece and Beauchamp, and meditating revenge, he turned sullenly away.

The company began, soon after, to disperse, and on leaving, the hand of Will Beauchamp lingered in that of Blanche Douglas (with rather a long and warm pressure), as he wished her good night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Tuesday following, early, Beauchamp rode over to the Priory, to keep his engagement with Mrs. Gordon; and on being ushered into the drawing-room, there, to his astonishment, sat Blanche Douglas. Starting with surprise at so unexpectedly meeting her, with whom his thoughts had been so busily engaged during his ride, and up to the moment of entering the room, he stammered forth something about the unlooked-for pleasure of seeing her at the Priory. His confusion did not escape the fair girl, who rose and held out her hand

to greet him with a cheerful smile; although her embarrassment more than equalled his own.

"You did not expect to meet me here, then?" she said.

"Oh, no. I did not anticipate so early and delightful a reunion, after our last meeting, as Mrs. Gordon merely asked me to assist her in some alterations she was making in her garden. But when did you arrive?"

"Yesterday; aunt sent the carriage for me, and I am to remain with her a week."

"Then I hope," said Beauchamp, "she will require my services as head-gardener for the same period. It is so seldom, dear Blanche," said he, as he sat down, and took her hand in his, which he felt trembling at his touch; "it is so seldom we now meet, as we used to do; but the Heiress of Ardwell must no longer be to her friends the Blanche Douglas of happier days,—at least, so Mrs. Harcourt told me the other evening."

"Did she tell *you* so, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Yes," he replied, mournfully; "and are not her words nearly confirmed, when Blanche's old friend William is addressed as Mr. Beauchamp?"

"And yet," she said, timidly, though firmly, "Blanche Douglas will, I hope, ever be Blanche Douglas to William Beauchamp and his dear sister Constance."

"Heaven grant it!" he replied fervently, "unchanged in heart, though I must not expect in name.—Next month you will make your *début* in public, as the heiress; and oh! Blanche, think you not of the homage (your just due) which will then be offered at your feet by the rich, the titled, and the gay, all eager for a share of those sunny smiles, by which the heart of William Beauchamp has been so often gladdened, when pressing the hand he now holds within his own. Fearful to me, alas! will be that change, whose coming I dread, as about to separate us for ever."

"Oh, never, William, believe me, can I so change towards you, as to prefer new acquaint-

ances, however agreeable, to old and well-tried friends."

A tap at the window made Beauchamp spring from the sofa, and there stood aunt Gordon; but how long she had been there, he did not then know. Blanche at the same moment hurried from the room, to put on her bonnet; and Beauchamp, taking up his hat, hastened to meet Mrs. Gordon in the garden, who, shaking hands with him most cordially, said, "So, William, instead of coming to help aunt Gordon in her garden, you have been occupied in the drawing-room making love to her niece. What have you to say, sir, to this grave charge? guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, dear aunt Gordon."

"Then why that heightened colour and averted eye? I expected candour, not evasion, from William Beauchamp," she replied, looking offended.

"From you, my dear, kind friend," said Beauchamp, "I have no concealments; you have a double right to know what I said to Blanche, and

every word I have spoken to her shall be repeated to you." He then related the conversation which had passed between them, which had arisen from Mrs. Harcourt's observations to him the other night, and the melancholy reflections that had filled his mind ever since, that Blanche Douglas would soon be lost to him for ever.

"So then, William, you do love my niece, notwithstanding your plea of not guilty to making love just now."

"Dear aunt Gordon, I will not deny that her happiness is dearer, far dearer to me than my life; but there is a barrier between us, which cannot be passed. Her guardian expects she will marry a person either of high rank, or, at least, of fortune equal to her own, which is but reasonable; and there can be little doubt, that on her entrance into the world, her beauty and attractions, joined with that far greater recommendation, money, will immediately cause even coronets to be laid at her feet. What then, should I selfishly endeavour (by gaining this dear girl's early affections) to debar her from

all those glittering, lofty prospects in life, to which she is so justly entitled? No, my dear madam, it cannot, and shall not be said of Will Beauchamp, that he ever stood in the path of Blanche Douglas (even had he the power to do so), to prevent her promotion to a higher sphere, in which she is so eminently qualified to shine."

"Then it is the opinion of Mr. William Beauchamp, that honours and riches are the only things which can confer happiness."

"One would think so," he replied, "by the avidity with which they are so universally sought after. But surely the fortunate possessors of great talents, or endowments, may lawfully aspire to, and accept, any higher preferment offered them, as a just tribute to their deserts."

"Then, in your opinion, Blanche, being a very worldly-minded young lady, aspires to the rank of a Duchess, or Marchioness, at least."

"Far be it from me," replied Beauchamp, "to impute worldly considerations to a mind so pure, unselfish, and artless, as that of your dear,

kind-hearted, unaffected niece; but my meaning was simply this;—among the aristocracy, there are to be found more men of refined ideas, gentlemanly conduct, and high character, (and you must admit of much more polished manners,) than in any other class of gentlemen, taking an equal number from either. And such being the case, which I do not think will be disputed, there can be no just cause, why Blanche should refuse the offer of any young nobleman who might render himself agreeable to her. She is herself of very old family, already connected with some of the highest rank, and, with the addition of a large landed property, she may, without being accused of worldly-mindedness, or ambition, compete with any Duke's daughter in the land."

"This may be all true, my dear William," replied Mrs. Gordon, "except that, among our young nobility, there are many who would not be slow to woo any young heiress for the sake of her money only. But supposing Blanche were no heiress, after all, and dependent only on

her aunt Gordon for anything she might be able to leave her, would you, in that case, make an avowal of your love?"

"Not even in that case, dear aunt Gordon, would I now fetter her with an engagement to myself, which, in mixing more with the world, she might afterwards seriously repent In my opinion, every young girl should have a fair allowance of time and opportunities of selecting a husband from more general society, before being encumbered by an early and perhaps imprudent attachment. We think some things very beautiful, until we see others more beautiful."

"Very true, William; but we ought to love human beings, not for their beauty of person, but their beauty of mind."

"And yet a handsome person is, at first sight, a great attraction both to men and women."

"Well, then, your meaning is this, that my niece Blanche is first to have her choice of all the handsome, gay young men (numbers of whom will, no doubt, be trying hard to carry off the

prize), and failing to find one of that number suited to her requirements, she can fall back upon William Beauchamp as a *dernier ressort*, who promises to hold himself disengaged, the while, and await patiently her royal decision."

"Even so, dear aunt, for I am not likely to change."

"Then you are one of the most romantic simpletons I have ever had the honour of being acquainted with, William Beauchamp. In fact, this is your weak point; but now listen to my opinion. I have long known you as a high-spirited, generous-hearted boy, and am foolish enough to love you as my own son. Think you, then, that I will permit your happiness to be risked on such a hazard as this, in which my dear Blanche will be equally compromised, if (as, I believe, is the case) she really loves you as much as you do her? No, William, it shall not be. Mr. Harcourt is not her only guardian; I am one also, and without our joint consent, she cannot marry, until of age. He is worldly-minded and ambitious; I am the re-

verse, and in marriage, I know well, the only lasting happiness can arise from true and devoted attachment, founded on esteem of character, with fixed and firm principles of virtue and religion. You are the only young man I have yet met with, to whom I could with confidence entrust my dear Blanche ; and now that I know you do love her, with my consent she shall never marry any other man."

"Nay, nay, my dear kind friend, this you must not say; for if Blanche should prefer another to me, so far from preventing, I would do all in my power to promote her happiness in a union with that man, even though that act should consign me, as it doubtless would, to hopeless despair."

"My dear boy," replied Mrs. Gordon, "where could Blanche find one of truer nobility of mind than William Beauchamp?"

"Many, perhaps, more worthy of her love."

"Never," replied Mrs. Gordon, "were she to search through the whole world."

"Then, at any rate, I shall not be satisfied,

till she has had the opportunity of trying whether such a person does exist or not. And you must promise me, dear aunt, moreover, never to reveal the disclosure I have made to you this morning, or you will never see me at the Priory again."

"That promise, it is unnecessary for me to give, loving you as I do, and you may safely confide your happiness and honour to my keeping; those, I promise you, shall not be compromised; but here comes Blanche—don't blush, or look foolish."

"Where have you been wandering, dear aunt?" she inquired. "I have been looking for you in the flower garden, and through all the walks in vain."

"Well, dear child, I am sorry to have occasioned you so much trouble, but I took William to this point for a full view of the lawn, before we commenced our work of cutting it into beds; but, bless me, how forgetful I am to-day!—where is Constance all this time?"

"She will be here to luncheon," replied

Beauchamp ; " but having some letters to write, I rode over first."

" Well, then, now to our business. Go, dear Blanche, and bring that book of designs from the conservatory, and whilst I call the gardener with his string and pegs to mark out, you and William can look over the book, and choose what you like best."

" Well, aunt," said Beauchamp, " we will wait your return in the conservatory, which is a more congenial atmosphere than this on a November day."

Blanche appeared at first rather indisposed to this arrangement, fearing further disclosures from Beauchamp ; but they were soon after busily engaged in comparing the various merits of Catherine wheels, gothic roses, Maltese crosses, and such like devices.

" Some of these are very pretty," remarked Beauchamp, " but the idea of a new pattern has struck me ;" and taking out his pencil, he drew a small design, with two B's and two D's opposite to each other, but joined, forming four beds ;

the centre turf to be occupied by a standard rose tree, and the four letters as beds for violets, pansies, forget-me-nots, and heliotrope. Handing it to Blanche, he was asking her opinion, when Mrs. Gordon joined them.

"What is that you have been figuring?" she asked.

"Something quite new and emblematical," he replied; "B and D stand for Blanche Douglas—now you must guess, of what the flowers are emblematical. The rose tree?"

"Beauty, of course," replied aunt Gordon.

"Blue and white violets; what do they represent?"

Blanche and her aunt guessed at once—modesty and candour. "And very appropriate too," remarked Mrs. Gordon.

"Pansies?"

The two ladies guessed in vain.

"Think of me," said Beauchamp, which brought a blush into Blanche's cheek. "Forget-me-not follows as a matter of course. The last bed is to be filled with heliotrope, the meaning

of which I shall leave you both to find out. So now, dear aunt, if you approve the design, let us carry it out at once."

"Approve it, William? I am quite delighted with it. This flower-bed will be my pet, of all others, ever reminding me of dear Blanche, when she may be separated from me, and of that kind boy who suggested it, as a memorial, emblematical of her I love so tenderly. But now, dear William, tell me the language of the heliotrope, that I may have my lesson complete."

"I cannot indeed tell you, dear aunt, so you must really set your wits to work to find it out."

"Will you then tell Blanche?"

"I would rather not," he replied, "unless she is particularly anxious to know."

"That, I am sure, she is—are you not, my love? so ask William, what the heliotrope means."

"Will you tell me, William?" she enquired, approaching him.

"Yes, dear Blanche, but you only;" and whispering in her ear, he murmured, "The

heliotrope, in the language of flowers, is *I love you !*"

At these words the colour rose on Blanche's cheeks, mounting to her very forehead, and her agitation became too perceptible.

"Have I offended you, dear Blanche?" enquired Beauchamp, gently taking her hand, as she was turning away. "Will you forgive this little escapade? not for worlds would I offer a word to you, which might prove displeasing or presuming. The heliotrope shall be discarded, and my words recalled, if you desire it."

"Indeed, I am not offended, William," she replied.

"Then give me your hand, dear Blanche, we must find the heliotrope another meaning for aunt Gordon. Constancy, that will do much better—and here she comes, Constance herself, tripping across the lawn."

"What are you all about?" she enquired, kissing Blanche, and running to Mrs. Gordon to confer on her the same favour.

"Guessing the language of flowers, and you

are just in time to exhibit in person the last emblem of the heliotrope," added Beauchamp, "which, I have told Blanche, means constancy, Constance Beauchamp."

"Oh, that is what you have been whispering about, is it, Mr. William? I thought there must be something very interesting to you both."

"Well, aunt, the secret is out at last, you see, and now we will finish the bed, if possible, before luncheon," with which, he set to work at once with the line and pegs to mark out the figure; Constance, with Blanche, running off to the conservatory for the other patterns.

"Well," said Constance, after looking through the book; "there is nothing very new here, so I will suggest another device to stand opposite to Blanche Douglas—C. B., Constance Beauchamp."

"Oh, that will be quite charming, and, I think, a better pattern than mine," replied Blanche.

"No, dear girl, I cannot stand in comparison with you in a garden or a ball-room, but am

content to occupy a less prominent position ; in love and affection do I only claim to be your equal. And now you shall select the flowers to fill my beds, as William did for yours."

In these innocent recreations and amusements, the day passed rapidly away, until nearly four o'clock, when Bob Conyers appeared on the scene, and highly applauded the patterns which had been cut out by the gardener on the lawn. "But these two," he said, "the inventions of William and Constance, please me more than anything I have yet seen in the shape of flower beds, and, with the emblems selected for them, are quite perfection."

The evening now turning cold and damp, an adjournment was made to the house, and at six o'clock the five staunch friends sat down to dinner, no other company being asked.

"Ah, well!" exclaimed Bob, "this is quite delightful! a snug, cozy family party, without forms or ceremonies, and, after dinner, we will all draw round to the fireside, and thoroughly enjoy ourselves."

"But we cannot sit drinking port-wine and claret with you gentlemen," replied Mrs. Gordon.

"Oh, yes, you can, and must, to-night, and we shall see who will be under the table first, a lady or a gentleman," he added, playfully. "Will and I can't stand more than a bottle a-piece, and I expect will be floored before the ladies. Then I'll sing some pretty songs, give toasts, and talk of fox-hunting and love-making; we'll have a jolly night of it, won't we, Constance?"

"I suspect we should, indeed, and a queer morning too, were we all to finish our bottle round, as you propose; and fine entertainment it would afford the ladies'-maids, in carrying their mistresses up stairs to bed."

"By Jove! that would be something quite *outré*, as the monsieurs have it; and I should like to see old Harcourt's phiz, when the news reached him, of the heiress being rather the worse for liquor."

"Really, Mr. Conyers," exclaimed Mrs. Gor-

don, "I fear you are already half seas over, and not fit for ladies' society, to hear you run on in this ridiculous strain."

"Oh, no, my dear madam, I have taken nothing to-day, before I sat down to your hospitable board, since my breakfast; but my spirits are quite elated, in this friendly little party, all looking so joyous and happy. And now, ladies (after the dessert had been placed on the table), I vote we remove to the fireside, and, with a table in the centre, make ourselves comfortable, until you are tired of Beauchamp and myself." The vote being seconded, and carried without opposition, Bob continued—"As I will not venture on a toast with 'Fill the bumpers fair,' I will give you a sentiment instead; and now, join all hands round—'May no worldly considerations, or evil influences, sever this link of hands and hearts, now joined so happily together.'"

"Amen," responded Mrs. Gordon, fervently; "may they never be rent asunder, but by the hand of death."

"Hark!" exclaimed Conyers, "how the rain

patters against the windows! By Jove! we shall have a terrible night to drive home in."

"There is no necessity for your going," replied Mrs. Gordon; "there are beds for you all."

"I must return home," said Conyers, "having a very early engagement to-morrow morning."

"Then Constance must stay, at least, as she drove over in the phaeton, and I will not allow her to return in it, such a night as this; you, gentlemen, can do as you please."

To this arrangement Constance at first demurred; but being over-ruled by Mrs. Gordon and Blanche's entreaties, consented to remain,—her brother promising to drive over the next day, and take her home.

After the gentlemen had left the Priory, that night, no allusion was made by Blanche to her friend about her brother's conduct, neither did Constance mention his name. Mrs. Gordon also wisely forbore, during Blanche's stay with her, to make the slightest remark, which might lead her niece to suppose William Beauchamp had ever entrusted her with the

secret of his heart. But Blanche pondered long and deeply on his words, and treasured up a little sprig of heliotrope he had given her (unperceived by any one), at parting, the day he drove over for his sister.

CHAPTER VII.

We must now pass over a few days, until the fixture at Lord Mervyn's seat, Marston Castle, when a grand collation was prepared, of which few were disposed to partake, notwithstanding Will Beauchamp's leading the way, and pressing others to follow his example. His Lordship was no favourite with any of the old county families, and his very look gave the lie direct to any friendly or hospitable feeling. The fox-hunting community saw, at a glance, that his grand breakfast was only a sham and pretext to allay their well-grounded suspicions of his destruction to

their sport; and none, save a few of the most zealous supporters of the hunt, who deemed it an act of policy to present themselves in his breakfast-room, would condescend to enter within the vestibule of Marston Castle.

Avoided by his son, feared by his daughter, and despised by his wife, Lord Mervyn stood aloof, even from his own family; and, although possessing a large circle of acquaintances, friendship or love were to him unknown.

It being impossible to dispel the gloom and formality which presided at the breakfast-table (a misnomer, indeed, as far as his guests were concerned, who had breakfasted at home), where everything remained untasted, save a few glasses of liqueurs, a proposal was made by Beauchamp to commence the business of the day, as a large company had assembled in front of the castle, more from curiosity to watch the proceedings of this eventful day (the first on which the hounds had ever been invited to grace the lawn of Marston Castle), than from any expectation of sport.

"Ah, here he comes at last," exclaimed old farmer Stubbins (as Lord Mervyn appeared at the hall-door), "with his long lantern jaws and vinegar looks, enough to turn a pan of new milk; but I be'ant to be gammoned, if the gentlefolk be. I wouldn't take sup nor bite, at his board, for fear of being poison'd or choked; dang it, neighbor Stiles, he's a bad un!"

"Ay, ay, Stubbins, there's not much doubt about that; but there's something in the wind now—election time's drawing on again, so my lord is playing a new game—courts the red coats and the fox-hunting farmers, this time, but 'twon't do, Mr. Stubbins."

"'Tis no use his courting me, Mr. Stiles, for I'll never vote for kith or kin of his; but I say, neighbor, where's the ould squire?—doant see his face here, I'll warrant—ould birds bean't caught wi' chaff."

"Nor young uns, neither, Stubbins, of that family; for the young squire looks as if he'd been swallowing summut as don't sit very light on his stomach this morning. But there, you

see, being master now, and manager of the pack, he is obliged to be civil to all parties, to keep things together; and nobody can blame him for trying to make friends with my lord there; but a man half blind can see it goes all against the grain."

Lord Mervyn's shooting cob being brought to the door, the hounds were trotted off to Marston wood, which was almost alive with game, hares and rabbits scurrying across the drives by scores, and pheasants whizzing up into the air in all directions. Not a whimper, however, was heard from a single hound, as the pack dashed through the underwood, with the whippers-in in close attendance, to prevent any hares, which might be chopped, from being eaten.

Soon a holloa was heard and repeated in one of the by-drives, to which locality Will Beauchamp immediately repaired, but not with his usual alacrity.

"A fox just crossed over here, sir," said one of the under-keepers, still holloaing with all his might.

"That's noise enough," shouted Beauchamp; "which way is he gone?"

"There, sir, just before your horse's nose."

The hounds were on the spot, but looking about only, they would not own the scent. "Very odd," remarked the keeper, "I swear, I saw the fox not ten minutes agone, close to that little oak."

At this moment several halloas were heard in the large drive, where Lord Mervyn was posted, with Sir Francis, Bob Conyers, and many more.

"Here he crossed!" exclaimed Sir Francis, as Beauchamp galloped up with the pack. Still not a hound would speak to the scent, although they dashed into the wood, spreading far and wide.

"What's the meaning of this, Beauchamp?" enquired Sir Francis, in surprise; "there's not an atom of scent this morning; they can't even own it."

"They *won't* own it, Sir Francis," replied Beauchamp, with a strong emphasis on the word "won't."

"Hah! hah!" said Bob, "I thought as much; he's a bagman, Will."

"No doubt of it," replied the master; "but hark! Charley views him now; let us go and hear what *he* says."

The hounds were round the whipper-in, when Beauchamp, Bob, Sir Francis, and Lord Mervyn rode up. "What's the matter, Charles?" asked Beauchamp; "the hounds won't run the fox."

"Because, sir, he's been shook out of a bag, this morning, or the keeper's long pocket."

"It's false, sir!" shouted Lord Mervyn, with his usual impetuosity; "how dare a servant offer his opinion in that manner?"

"Simply because, my good Lord," replied Sir Francis, "it was his duty to do so, when asked by his master."

"I will soon satisfy you, Sir Francis, and all the gentlemen," said Charley, touching his cap, "that I am no liar." And begging his master to ride with the hounds through the upper part of the wood, he disappeared. In a few minutes after, the report of a gun was heard, and a

single whoop from Charley, who came trotting down the large drive, with the dead fox on his saddle. "Now, Sir Francis," said the whipper-in, throwing the carcass on the ground, "there's the bagman with the mark of the collar on his neck, and his brush full of oat chaff, and if any hound touches him, I'm a liar!"

Old Rambler walked up, and, cocking his leg against his dead foe, turned sulkily away. Not a hound offered to touch him, all leaving him as he lay. Sir Francis and Bob Conyers dismounted to examine also, the former exclaiming,

"You are quite right, Charley; he is a bagman, and no mistake!"

Lord Mervyn was furious, declaring he would discharge all his keepers, if he could discover they had been concerned in the business.

"I think you ought to dismiss one at least," replied Sir Francis, "for serving us such a dirty trick. But now, for finding a wild fox—the day is slipping away."

"I am at his Lordship's commands, to draw what covers he pleases," replied Beauchamp.

"You can try where you like, Mr. Beauchamp; all, every hedgerow of which I am owner."

"Very well, my Lord; it shall be done as you desire." With which, they quitted Marston Wood.

"I say, Charley," asked Bob Conyers, riding by his side, "how did you manage to get hold of that gun?"

"Easily enough, sir. I went to where the head-keeper was standing in the other drive—just the place where foxes generally cross over—and getting off my horse, asked him to hold him a minute, while I went into the high wood. There lay the gun against that tree. 'Mr. Sharpum,' I said, 'my horse don't like the smell of powder, and don't you speak or move, for I think the fox is coming our way.' Sharpum fell into the trap nicely, when, in a few seconds, I heard a bit of a stir among the leaves, and, sure enough, the poor devil of a fox came trotting down to where I was standing. Then, stepping quickly back to Mr. Sharpum, with my finger on my lips to keep quiet, I seized the

gun, and, before he guessed what I was up to, knocked over the bagman. 'What do you mean by that?' growled out Sharpum. 'You will soon know,' said I; and taking hold of my horse, picked up the fox and galloped away."

"Cleverly done, by Jove, Charley! You are up to a dodge or two, as well as your namesake."

All Lord Mervyn's coverts, every hedgerow almost, were drawn blank; and not a challenge was heard from any hound, until they reached a small gorse covert, belonging to Farmer Stiles, on the outskirts of Marston Manor, from which, at half-past three o'clock, a fine old fox was viewed away, and run into, within twenty minutes.

"Short and sweet!" exclaimed Sir Francis, as they pulled him down in the open.

"Too short for such a fox as that," remarked Bob; "he ought to have stood an hour at least. Something queer about his being finished in twenty minutes; what is it, Charley?"

"A little more of Mr. Sharpum's handywork, sir," handing Bob one of the forepads,

all the toes of which had been cut off by a trap, and the wound scarcely healed.

"Confound that fellow Mervyn!" exclaimed Sir Lucius Gwynne; "he wants a devilish good horse-whipping—making fools of all the field, this morning, with that bagman, and trapping every fox that puts his nose within his boundaries! Egad, gentlemen, I propose we all have a day's shooting in his preserves, and see how he will like our spoiling his sport."

"Ay, ay!" responded several voices—"serve him right!—we will join you any day at that fun!"

"Stop a little, Gwynne," said Sir Francis; "give him another chance; and if we don't find a sound fox, the next time the hounds draw Marston, put my name on the list for the shooting party."

When the fox was thrown to the hounds, Will Beauchamp rode up to Mr. Stiles, and shaking him by the hand, thanked him for the fox found in his covert.

"Welcome, Squire, welcome to a dozen, if I

could keep 'em there! We had a fine litter bred this season in that patch of gorse, but they're all trapped, save the old dog, which the hounds are now eating."

"I'm sorry to hear it, Stiles," replied Beauchamp; "but we know your good disposition to the foxes, although your neighbours won't allow you to keep them."

"Ah!" sneered Vernon to a friend, or rather guest, of Lord Mervyn's, "that fellow, Beauchamp, wins the hearts of those clodhoppers, the farmers, by shaking their dirty hands."

"Handling the plough is not half such dirty work as handling the dice-box!" exclaimed a dashing young farmer, who overheard Vernon's remarks.

"And, who are you?—you insolent blackguard!" demanded Vernon, turning sharply round upon him.

"My name is Hazel," retorted the young man; "and if you don't beg my pardon, this minute, for calling me an insolent blackguard, I'll blacken your face with my dirty hand, and

knock you off your horse, into the bargain!" then riding close up to him, with his clenched fist, Vernon showed the white feather, murmuring out some apology. "And now, Mr. Vernon," said Hazel, "I'll just warn you to keep a civil tongue in your mouth. We dirty-handed farmers work hard enough to turn an honest penny, which is more than you do; and if you give us any more of your sauce, we know how to prevent your insulting us in the field, whatever you may say behind our backs."

It being then very late, the hounds returned to the kennels.

We will now transfer our readers, in imagination, to the dining-room of Marston Castle, where, seated round the fire, after the ladies had retired, were Lord Mervyn, Richard Vernon, and Mr. Harper (his Lordship's right-hand man in electioneering affairs). The conversation turned on the events of the day, and Lord Mervyn was bitterly inveighing against the insolence of Beauchamp's whipper-in, in shooting the fox.

"Were I in your situation, my Lord," remarked Vernon, "I would warn Beauchamp and the whole crew off my lands."

"That I cannot do, Vernon, or we should lose our election, next year, for my son; and, at this moment, every vote is of consequence to the government."

"Well, then, after the election; it will do then."

"Change of ministry, dissolution of Parliament—all such contingencies have to be considered," replied Lord Mervyn, "so that a seat in the Commons is never secure for any certain period in these changing times. No, no, Vernon; we can safely and successfully wage war against the foxes, and lay the blame on the keepers, but as to waging war with all the foxhunters and foxhunting farmers, that is too bold a stroke to venture upon. The whole country would be up in arms directly."

"Well, then, my Lord, what think you of a 'bold stroke for a husband' for the heiress?"

"I don't comprehend your meaning; pray explain," said Lord Mervyn.

"That is easily done. Money is the ruling power, and without it, my Lord—and a good deal of it, too—a pack of foxhounds, with the necessary establishment of servants, horses, and numerous other items of expenditure, contingent thereon, cannot be long kept up."

"Certainly not; they must cost a very large sum annually."

"Exactly so, my Lord; and the Beauchamps are reported to have maintained a hard struggle in supporting their establishment hitherto, which cannot last much longer."

"They are assisted, I am told, by some large subscriptions," observed Lord Mervyn.

"Nothing very great," replied Vernon, "although the exact sum is known only to the Secretary Conyers, who, being a friend of Will Beauchamp's, will not mention the amount; at any rate, all agree it is not half what it ought to be. Well, under these circumstances, an additional ten thousand a-year would carry the concern on swimmingly, and enable the Beauchamps to keep it up without any subscription at all."

"Most likely," replied Lord Mervyn. "But where is the ten thousand a-year to come from?"

"Miss Douglas, my Lord; for people say she is much attached to Beauchamp and his sister."

"Pshaw! nonsense, Vernon! Harcourt will never allow her to marry such a man as Mr. Beauchamp."

"Perhaps not, my Lord; but you forget her aunt, Mrs. Gordon, is equally her guardian, and we all know what a favourite Beauchamp is with her."

"But I am told," said Lord Mervyn, "that you are in a fair way of winning the prize yourself."

"No, my Lord, my chance is a very poor one; in fact, Mrs. Harcourt gave me to understand, nothing short of a coronet would do for her niece, and hinted at Lord Malcolm, who is expected soon at Throseby Hall; but as he is a very slow coach, neither very handsome nor agreeable, I have been thinking, if your Lordship knows

of any young, good-looking, fascinating sprig of nobility, with more wits than ready cash, you might do him a good turn, by asking him down, about the time of our county ball, when the heiress makes her *début* in public, and, a hundred to one, he cuts *out* Mr. William Beauchamp, and cuts *off* all further support to the fox-hounds."

"Capital," exclaimed Lord Mervyn, as a sneering smile passed over his cadaverous countenance, "you are quite a diplomatist, Vernon, and I must get you appointed Secretary to one of our Embassies, really a very good idea; but let me consider——"

"What do you say to Lord Vancourt?" enquired Mr. Harper.

"The very man," exclaimed Lord Mervyn. "We owe him a turn of favour (although we did help his father to the peerage) for his staunch adherence to our party; he is just the man—tall, very handsome — with highly polished manners and address, devoted to the ladies; in short, the

very person to captivate a young, unsophisticated country girl."

"Then your Lordship could invite him down at once, and ask the Harcourts to spend a few days at Marston, before Lord Malcolm arrives. A few walks and rides with Lord Vancourt as her companion, and the many opportunities which will be afforded him, when under the same roof, of paying uninterrupted attention to the young lady, will, I have little doubt, finish the business off-hand, particularly if you play your cards cleverly with old Harcourt, and represent Lord Vancourt as a man of substance, &c.."

"It shall be done, Vernon, without delay, and you must come here also to help in playing out the comedy."

"Tragedy, more likely," added Harper, with a laugh, "for Lord Vancourt is as bad-tempered and debauched a fellow as any man about town, and devilish hard up for cash too! I only hope, Harcourt won't find him out till after *church time*, that's all. Hah! hah!"

"We will try and exhibit the picture in the

best light, shading his imperfections from view as much as possible," said Lord Mervyn. "But Vancourt must strike, whilst the iron is hot—" which last sentence was escaping his Lordship's lips, when one of the footmen entered the room, with that noiseless step peculiar to London-trained servants, and stood as if awaiting orders.

"What the devil do you stand there for?" demanded Lord Mervyn, in a rage.

"I thought the dining-room bell rang, my Lord," replied the man, very gravely.

"No, sir, it did not; and I'll thank you to make sure it does, another time, before you dare present yourself in my presence without being summoned."

The servant bowed low and withdrew, but as he shut the door, a slight curl played for a moment round his upper lip; in the next, the usual cold, apathetic look resumed its place.

"Hang that fellow!" exclaimed Vernon, "he must have heard your Lordship's last remarks."

"What if he did? It was only a common-place observation."

"Well, perhaps not," said Vernon. "I only hope he did not overhear Harper's encomiums on Lord Vancourt."

"Pooh! nonsense, Vernon, that's next to an impossibility," replied his Lordship, much chafed at the idea. But it was a possibility, and a fact too—the man had overheard every word of it—for happening to pass by the dining-room door, in returning from the drawing-room, the name of Beauchamp struck his ear, and knowing his Lord's and Vernon's dislike to the young Squire (as he was generally termed), he stood, an eager listener, at the door, and heard the whole plot against Miss Douglas; but the butler coming suddenly upon him, obliged him to enter the room to prevent detection in the act of eavesdropping.

Thomas Carter, the first footman, had been born and bred-up in the village of Bampton, until fourteen years of age, when he was taken by a friend of Mr. Beauchamp's as the junior domestic in his establishment, from which he rose with his years and inches, until having

quarrelled with the butler, he obtained the situation he now held and had occupied for two years in Lord Mervyn's household; retaining still a strong attachment to his native village, and to the young Squire, who had shown him great kindness when a boy. He was also connected (though unknown to Lord Mervyn) with old Farmer Rosier, a late tenant on the Marston estates, whose crops having been destroyed, year after year, by the hares and rabbits, without any redress or allowance from his landlord, was at last completely ruined, and all his goods and chattels being distrained upon for rent, which it was impossible for him to pay, he would have been mercilessly turned upon the parish, but for his son, Mark Rosier, who rented a cottage on Mr. Styles's farm, with whom he found constant employment.

Mark was a tall, stout, athletic young man of twenty-two, active as a tiger, and bold as a lion—yet, withal, of a kind disposition; but his father's injuries, and the injustice he had experienced from Lord Mervyn, rankled in his breast, and he

determined to take his revenge on the game, which had been the cause of his father's ruin. In fact, Mark Rosier had now become, from his courage and knowledge of wood-craft, the leader of a daring gang of poachers, who preyed almost exclusively on Lord Mervyn's preserves, for he was universally disliked by all classes (the poor especially), for his haughty, over-bearing character.

Mark's gang consisted of six young fellows, besides himself, who were bound together by an oath, never, in any emergency, to split upon each other, and one of their rules was never to sit drinking in any public house. The booty was fairly divided amongst them, being sent up to London by a night coach, the guard of which was well paid for his trouble. Instead of common powder and shot, air guns, with a single ball, were their only weapons, by which the pheasants were noiselessly knocked off their perches; the most windy and boisterous nights being always selected for their depredations.

From this digression we must return to Mar-

ston castle, where Lord Mervyn, Vernon, and Harper, having completed their plot for the destruction of Miss Douglas's happiness for life, by uniting her to Lord Vancourt, an adjournment was made to the drawing-room, where sat Lady Mervyn, in regal state, with her only daughter, a timid, child-like girl of about sixteen, who scarcely dared to open her lips in her mother's presence. As Vernon gazed on her pale, interesting features and downcast eyes, a sudden thought passed through his mind, and he sat down by her side, with the hope of drawing her into conversation. But the stolen glances towards her father and mother, with her monosyllabic replies to his questions, revealed to him the tyranny under which she suffered. Still she appeared pleased with his attentions, and ventured on a quiet smile at some of his witty remarks. "Do you sing, Miss Mervyn?" he asked.

"No," was the reply, "Mamma says, my voice is not sufficiently cultivated to sing in company."

" Do you play, then ?"

" Yes, when Mamma desires me."

" Does Lady Mervyn allow you ever to walk by yourself, without one of those tall footmen behind you ?"

" Only in the morning, before breakfast."

Vernon was proceeding to other questions, when Lady Mervyn called him away. But knowing that Miss Mervyn had been left by her grand-mother thirty thousand pounds, which would be her own, when she should marry, or become of age, without any restriction, he had mentally resolved on appropriating the young lady and her money to himself, as every prospect of obtaining the heiress was entirely at an end. How he succeeded will hereafter be shown ; and we now take our leave of the inmates of Marston Castle for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the following morning a dispatch was addressed to Lord Vancourt, at his father's seat in Bedfordshire, with a pressing invitation from Lord Mervyn ; and in the postscript, a hint about the heiress with ten thousand a year ; to which an answer was quickly returned by Lord Vancourt, naming Monday week for his visit to Marston Castle.

The intelligence of the new visitor's expected arrival, on the day appointed, soon spread through the household ; and Thomas Carter, the footman, having obtained leave of absence for an hour or

two, one afternoon, sent a message, by a trusty friend, to Mark Rosier, to meet him in a by-road near the village. Mark was true to his appointment, and shaking hands with Thomas, enquired why he wished so particularly to see him.

"You shall soon hear what I want you for, Mark, but let us go across the field to that cow-house yonder. We may be seen here together by some of my Lord's men; and you are no favourite, you know."

"There's no love lost between us," said Mark.

Having looked well all round the cow-house, Thomas began:—

"There's a plot hatched up at the castle, between my Lord and Vernon, to bring down a young scamp, called Lord Vancourt, to cut out the young squire with Miss Douglas; for people do say that the young lady is very partial to Mr. William. So, my Lord and Vernon is desperately afraid she'll marry him, and her money

help to keep on the hounds, as the old squire is hard up."

"'Tis a lie, Tom! The ould squire ain't hard up, but as sound in the pocket as ever that sallow-faced Lord is."

"Well, Mark, that's what Vernon said."

"He's a liar, then—but now, let us hear what I can do in this business; for sooner than any one of that old rascal's friends should marry that young lady, I'll put one of my *silent* bullets through his heart, that's what I'll do for him, Tom."

"No, you won't—we can do without it."

"I tell you what it is, Tom—the old squire sent for father t'other day, and asked him all about his being turned out of the farm by my Lord up there:—'Never mind, Rosier,' said he, 'you are a hardly-used man, and as Giles leaves his holding, at Lady-day, for a larger farm, you shall have it then, so make your mind easy, and here's a ten-pound note to help you to get a few things together now. 'Oh, squire,' said father, 'I be thankful, very thankful, for your kindness to an old, broken-down man, but

where be I to find stock for five acres, much more for a hundred and fifty?' 'You'll find it all there, Rosier, ready for you, sheep, cows, pigs, and horses, for which you can pay me, when you are able, and not before. 'Oh, squire,' said father, falling down on his knees, and crying like a child, 'I can't thank'e, sir, as I ought, my heart's too full.' 'Get up,' said Mr. Beauchamp, 'you blubbering old fool, or I'll horse-whip thee; and now, go along to the house-keeper's room, and harkee, tell Mark, Will wants to see him.' There, Tom, that's the old squire, and I'll go through fire and water to serve him, or any dear to him."

"And quite right, too, Mark," replied Tom; "but here's no fighting to be done now; and if you won't listen to reason, and be quiet, I'll say no more."

"Say on, then."

"First, you'll promise to keep it all snug, and tell the young squire to mind what he's about, too, or the whole thing will be blow'd at once, and I shall get the sack."

"Well, Tom, you may trust both of us that nothing shall come out; mum's the word—now to business."

"Then you go over to Bampton, Mark, and tell Mr. William that this young scamp is coming down to the castle, and old Harcourt and the young lady are to be asked over to meet him, and stay a few days, whilst my Lord is to gammon the old gentleman about Lord Vancourt being a capital match for his ward, rich, good character, and all that kind of thing; and the young lord is to gammon the heiress, as he's deuced handsome, and has got the gift of the gab. So tell Mr. William to let his sister see Miss Douglas afore she goes to Marston, and warn her of the trap that's so nicely baited to catch her in; that's all, Mark, for young girls is always took with fine, tall, smart men, like you and me, Mark, and, by all accounts, Lord Vancourt is all that, with a pretty deal more to boot. And if Miss Constance don't go over directly, and put Miss Blanche up to the trick, it's ten to one she's snapped up at once; and,

by all accounts, she'd better be buried than married to such a young rascal as this is—that's all, Mark, so, good bye, and I'll let you know more about him when he comes down."

Mark did not lose much time in going over to Bampton, the same evening, waiting in the servants' hall until dinner was removed, and the ladies had left the dining-room, when the butler whispered in his young master's ear, "Mark Rosier is waiting to see you, sir."

Beauchamp rose at once, and, leaving the room, went to the servants' hall.

"Well, Mark, what's in the wind now?"

"Something, sir," replied Mark in a low tone, "for your ear alone."

"Oh, very well, then follow me to the library."

When the door was closed, Mark placed his ear to the key-hole, for a second or two, to listen. "Ah," said Beauchamp, "there's something particular to-night. What is it, Mark? but our men don't practise that trick, eaves-dropping—found some more traps set, I suppose, by those rascally Marston keepers?"

"Worse than that, sir," replied Mark, "I've caught Lord Mervyn himself setting traps—not for foxes, sir, but for a young lady."

"Ah! indeed—what young lady?"

Mark then related the whole story he had heard from Thomas Carter, during which Beauchamp sat listening in breathless silence, his varying colour and contracted brow betraying his inward emotion. When he had finished, Mark inquired, "Well, sir, isn't that a deep and rascally trick? It beats poaching all to nothing."

"It's a dark, damnable plot, Mark," replied Beauchamp; "but a delicate business for me to handle, in warning the young lady of her danger; she may think it only a trick of mine, to prevent her marrying this young Lord, and women are very suspicious in such matters."

"Very true, sir, but Miss Constance must do it, not you."

"Even with her, Mark, it is very ticklish ground to enter upon."

"Then, sir, I'll settle it for you at once, by

putting a bullet through that scamp's head, before ever he enters Marston Castle."

"Hush! Mark," said Beauchamp, rising from his chair, "no man's blood shall be shed on my account."

"Many a man's blood has been shed for a much less offence than this, sir. What is robbing on the high way to trapping and plundering a young lady of all her property, in this bare-faced manner? that's what I want to know?"

"One is contrary to law, the other is not, Mark."

"Ay, ay, sir, law, — there it is,—law and lawyers,—cheating, robbing, murdering, may all be done *under* the law, but not *against* it."

"Well, we can't mend it, Mark."

"No, but this I'll mend so far, begging your pardon, I'll shoot that young scamp of a Lord, and the old un into the bargain, before he shall ever carry off that dear, sweet young lady, Miss Blanche. So, Squire, if you and Miss Constance won't save her from such a pit-fall as this, I will, sir, that's all, if I swing for it."

"No, Mark, this shall never be,—remember the commandment, 'thou shalt do no murder.'—This young Lord has a right to try his chance, as well as others. We may expose his and Lord Mervyn's attempts to sail under false colours, and make Miss Douglas the dupe of their dark designs; that is all we have a right to do. I and my sister must consider in what way to make the disclosure."

"It must be done at once, sir; mind, the trap is set already, and wants watching night and day. I and Thomas sha'n't have much to do with sleep, I'm thinking, when he comes down, and I hope, *you* won't, sir, so good night, Squire, you'll see me again shortly, but I mustn't keep you from your company any longer now."

"Then go and get some supper, Mark, and keep a still tongue on this matter."

"No fear of that, sir;" with which they parted.

On Beauchamp's return to the dining-room, he was asked by his father the name of his visitor.—Mark Rosier was the reply.

"Ah, a little more trickery a-foot, I suppose, Will."

"Just so, but nothing particularly interesting to our friends here."

The hint was sufficient to prevent further questions, although Conyers, who was of the party, resolved to know more about it; and when they left the dining-room, taking Beauchamp aside, he asked,

"What had Mark to tell you, Will? you have been thoughtful and absent ever since—what's the matter?"

"Something has annoyed me, Bob, that is all."

"Then if you consider me your friend, Beauchamp, let me share your annoyances and your pleasures equally,—your secret shall be safe with me."

"You are entitled to my confidence," said Beauchamp, "and in this matter particularly, where you have also an interest, but it must not pass your lips." He then related Mark's story.

"Ah, that scoundrel Vernon," exclaimed Bob, "revenge is sweet; I see it all, and must sleep

here to night, that you and I may talk over this business in the morning, and take Constance into our counsels. Women are quicker in such cases than men, so no more now on this subject."

The next morning, Constance was admitted to the conference on Lord Mervyn's plot; and although expressing herself quite willing to warn her friend of her danger, her opinion was, that Blanche might probably consider her interference in an equivocal light, and savouring perhaps of interested motives.

"You are right, Con," said Bob, "and this warning will come better from me; I will bring it about, somehow or other, so that neither you, your brother, nor Mark, can be compromised, as I am acquainted with a young fellow, belonging to Lord Vancourt's club in London, who knows him tolerably well, and from whom I can obtain all the information we require, as to his fortune, character, &c. &c.; for the rest, trust the brains of an old fox-hunter to checkmate these crafty Lords at their game of gammon. The Harcourts are all invited to Compton's on Friday

next, the day before our fixture there, when I hear there is to be a little dance in the evening, but don't, either you or Will, even allude to such a person as Lord Vancourt."

We must now pass over a few days, until the evening of Friday, in the ensuing week, when, about half past nine, all the principal families in the neighbourhood were assembled in the grand saloon at Mr. Compton's house, which had been tastefully arranged as a ball-room for this occasion. Among the company, Conyers recognized, much to his surprise, Captain Melville, to whom he had written a few days previously about Lord Vancourt.

"Ah! Melville," exclaimed Conyers, "what brings you into this part of the world?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, old fellow, and I don't think you'll blab, it is a little bit of speculation. Colonel Rolleston wrote me word, there was a young heiress just coming out down here, and if I liked to try my luck, he would do what he could to help me. So here I am, staying with Rolleston; and if the youg lady is

good-looking, as well as rich, I should not mind becoming a Benedict; but you know I cannot marry without money, although I would never tie myself to a plain disagreeable woman, were she as rich as Crœsus."

"Well," said Conyers, "there is something more manly in that confession than we meet with in most fortune hunters; but you will find more impediments to your suit than you imagine, as her guardian, Mr. Harcourt, who is here to-night, has set his mind on having a coronet for his ward, in the person of her cousin, expected down every day."

"That is bad news, indeed, Bob; but still I'll have a trial for her, if she suits my fancy."

"By the bye, Melville, have you seen anything of Lord Vancourt lately?"

"Not since the season closed in town, and I don't wish to see any more of him."

"Why so?"

"Because he is an ill-tempered, imperious fellow, disliked by every man in the club, and a confounded blackguard also."

"Indeed," said Conyers, affecting surprise.

"He is as poor as a church mouse, gambles and cheats at cards, like the devil, to keep up appearances, and keeps an Italian singer, to whom, report says, he is completely committed, or positively married, so that he cannot get rid of her. In fact, he has tried to palm her off on some of his friends, but the woman won't budge, and sticks to him like a leech."

"Egad! I did not expect to hear all this of Lord Vancourt; for a friend of mine asked me something about him, a short time ago, and I wrote to you, the other day, to enquire if you knew him."

"Too well," replied Melville; "but your letter was, I conclude, directed to my club, and has not reached me; and now, Bob, shew me the heiress."

"There she is, dressed in white, with pearls twisted in her hair, leaning on her aunt's arm, at the upper end of the room."

"What, that rather tall beautiful girl, now speaking to Mrs. Rolleston?"

"The same, Melville."

"Then, by Jove! she is, to my mind, the prettiest woman in the room, and I am off for an introduction."

In a few minutes after, Melville was presented by Mrs. Rolleston to Mrs. Harcourt and her niece; and his first words were addressed to the latter, requesting the honour of dancing with her. "I believe," replied Blanche, "that I am already engaged for every dance this evening." When Melville, disconcerted at this unexpected damper to his highly-wrought expectations, bowed and withdrew, as Beauchamp, who had dined that evening at Compton's and bespoke the first quadrille, approached and offered his arm.

The heiress being the great attraction of the evening, many inquisitive, and many more envious glances were directed towards her and her partner, to scan every look and gesture of each; but both were too much occupied with their own thoughts to think of others. Beauchamp's gentlemanly, quiet attentions, with his peculiarly happy and cheerful smile, and Blanche's radiant

looks, were noticed by Melville's quick eye, who inquired of Conyers the name of her partner.

"Beauchamp," was the reply, "our young Master of Fox-hounds; but why do you ask, Melville?"

"There's something so frank and manly in that fellow's face, with such quiet, kind manners, that any girl might fall in love with him; and I'll bet a cool hundred, by her behaviour, the heiress is booked already."

"Oh, nonsense," replied Conyers; "Will Beauchamp is one of the kindest-hearted fellows in the world, and has known Miss Douglas many years, but he is no fortune-hunter."

"Perhaps not," replied Melville; "but that girl thinks more deeply of him than you suppose."

"Not that, I'll engage—but now I will introduce you to Miss Markham, the wittiest, if not the prettiest girl in the room."

There was a very large conservatory at one end of the saloon, the doors of which were thrown open to afford a promenade to the

dancers after their exertions, flower-stands occupying the centre, with a wide walk round, and seats were disposed at the lower end under magnificent orange trees. To this Elysian retreat Beauchamp conducted his partner when the dance was over; and standing by her side, under the orange tree, examining the buds and young oranges, he alluded to their last meeting in aunt Gordon's conservatory, which called the crimson blush to her cheek.

"Tell me, dear Blanche," he said, "have you quite forgiven my presumption on that occasion?"

"Oh! yes, were it needed, your pardon has been long ago assured."

"Then, will you accept and wear this little trinket, which may sometimes remind you of my undying regard, when we may be separated for ever?"

"Do not say that, William, for I trust such will never be the case."

"Oh, that your words may be realised," he replied; "but will you accept my little offering,

a basket of flowers?" as he placed the trinket in her hand.

"Oh, William! what a pretty little ornament! intended for a brooch, I suppose?"

"Yes, dear Blanche, the design was my own; the flowers in stones, emblematical of those feelings I shall ever entertain towards you—will you keep it, and wear it for my sake?"

"Yes, indeed I will, William, though I require no such remembrancer of my regard for you."

"Thanks, dearest Blanche, for that admission, which I shall treasure up in the deepest recesses of my heart; but I must now lose your too dearly-prized society, as Captain Markham is approaching to claim your hand—that dear little hand," he added in a low tone, "which I would give worlds to call my own!"

Blanche blushed deeply, casting her eyes on the ground; but the Captain's near advance prevented her making any reply.

"Shall I keep the brooch for you, dear Blanche," he whispered, "until the ball is over?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "pray do."

"The last dance, remember," he added, "you have promised me."

"I shall not forget it, William," looking in his face, with an expression that made Beauchamp's heart throb and beat most joyfully, as she turned to accept the Captain's arm.

"Eh, pon honour, Miss Douglas," exclaimed Markham, "I have been searching for you in every corner; couldn't think where you had gone, the quadrille has begun already; but really this is a delightful place, don't wonder at your loitering here, with Will Beauchamp, too,—giving you an account of his last run, I suppose —good sort of fellow enough, but a little too fond of hunting,—not quite a ladies' man, eh! Miss Douglas."

"No," she replied gaily, "if by a ladies' man you mean one who is always making fine, flattering speeches and paying compliments he does not feel."

"Eh—no—not exactly; a true ladies' man devotes himself entirely to the fair sex, lives and exists only in their smiles."

"Then he must be, by your account, quite an ethereal being, and never thinks of eating supper at a ball, I conclude."

"Really, Miss Douglas, that is going a little too far, for, by Gad, I feel very peckish to-night, and intend doing ample justice to Compton's good things at one o'clock. But, demmit—I beg pardon, Miss Douglas, our place is occupied as *vis-à-vis* to that fallow Vernon and his partner, who promised to keep it open. What shall we do?—Gad! I have it—ask that good-tempered Beauchamp to find a partner, and then we can cut in somewhere."

This arrangement was soon made, much to Beauchamp's delight, who had again an opportunity of holding that hand in his, whose pressure told as much as words could explain. The evening passed pleasantly away with a succession of dances, for every one of which Miss Douglas had been speedily engaged on her first entering the room, until the hour of supper, when Bob Conyers handed her into the room; and Beauchamp politely offering his arm to Mrs. Harcourt,

it was graciously accepted. The friendly terms on which Beauchamp seemed to be with that lady called forth the sarcastic sneers of Vernon, who sat nearly opposite to them with one of the Miss Rollestons.

"Ah!" he said, "Beauchamp is trying to utter soft things to the old lady aunt, as well as the heiress, to-night; but the quarry is too high game for his arrows to reach."

"I think," remarked Miss Rolleston, "William Beauchamp has much to recommend him, were he to think seriously of Miss Douglas."

"Nothing that I know of," replied Vernon, "except a good voice with hounds and a tolerable seat on horseback, which any groom might possess."

"For shame, Mr. Vernon, to speak in such terms of one who is so universally admitted to be a perfect gentleman in manners and feelings; but I know Miss Douglas was a great favourite of yours once, and now, I suppose, the grapes are sour."

"The grapes are not to be plucked by plebeian hands," retorted Vernon, "therefore could never fall to my gathering or his, which that fool Beauchamp will soon find to his cost also."

"Miss Douglas is free to choose whom she pleases, I suppose," observed Miss Rolleston, "at least, when she comes of age; and if she will take my advice, she will marry the man of her own choice, not her guardian's."

"A coronet studded with gems is a very pretty attractive toy to a young, artless girl," said Vernon.

"But not to a sensible one," added Miss Rolleston.

"Oh, of course not; but there are not many such sensible young ladies as Miss Rolleston, who would refuse the glittering bauble when offered to them; and I suspect, after all, Miss Douglas will not decline to be made a peeress when the proposal is made."

"What proposal, Mr. Vernon?"

"Oh," replied he, carelessly, "her cousin Malcolm is named for one, and other poor devils of

our grand noblesse will, no doubt, put in a bidding, when she is trotted out for sale to the highest bidder, with old Harcourt as auctioneer.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Vernon," replied Miss Rolleston, indignantly, "to speak in such disrespectful terms of that sweet girl, whose greatest misfortune may be that she is an heiress."

A move was now made from the supper-table, and the last on the list being a country-dance, Beauchamp claimed Blanche's promise, and they were soon engaged with hands across, down the middle, up again, until she was nearly exhausted with this incessant work. "Come, dear Blanche," he whispered, "this is too much for you, who have been dancing all night. I will not allow you to go on longer, or you will be quite laid up to-morrow. Take my arm, we will walk about until you are cooler; for I heard Mrs. Harcourt say the carriage was ordered exactly at three, and it is now within a quarter of the time." Beauchamp was leading her to the conservatory again, when she said—

"Not there, William; my aunt will be angry if she cannot find us when the carriage arrives."

"One turn only, dear Blanche, to give up my little present to your keeping; but do not tremble or fear me, dearest; the word you apprehend shall not escape my lips again this night."

When they had reached the upper end, near the orange-trees, Beauchamp, taking Blanche's pocket-handkerchief, tied the little jewel-case in one corner of it, and returned it to her, without another word or comment. "And now, dear Blanche, we will attend upon your aunt, and I shall send Constance to-morrow to see how you are, as I must be out hunting."

In a few moments the carriage was announced, and the company began rapidly to disperse.

And now what are we to say of all William Beauchamp's good resolutions, which had been scattered to the winds? and his firm determination not to make Blanche Douglas acquainted with the feelings of his heart until she had mixed more in the world? All had been overruled by the dread of her falling into the trap

set for her by Lord Mervyn and Vernon. His love, long pent up within his own breast, was now suddenly called forth by the horror of losing her for ever, and her being wedded to such a fate as that designed by these unprincipled plotters against her fortune and happiness. The heiress ceased to be remembered as the heiress, Beauchamp thought only of that dear, pure-minded girl whose image had been so long entwined about his heart. "She ought at least to know," argued he, "that there is one who loves her dearer than his own life, and would support her through every trial." And he argued still more plausibly to himself that the confession of his love could be no barrier to her selection of any other person more congenial to her taste. This, of course, it would not have been, had Blanche been free of herself to choose; but, fortunately or unfortunately, Beauchamp's expression of love had struck a respondent chord in her heart, which vibrated through her whole frame.

On the night of Sir Lionel Markham's dinner-

party, Blanche had experienced certain inexplicable sensations towards William Beauchamp, which were redoubled on their meeting at the Priory a few days after; and she now felt, after carefully analysing her feelings, that she loved him dearly, intensely—and oh! the delight of that night's revelation—that she was beloved in return! Blanche Douglas had received the blessing of a sound religious education from a lady of good family, who had resided many years with her pupil, and who faithfully discharged her duty to her youthful charge, by firmly impressing on her mind those high principles of religion and morality, which would prove her greatest comfort and protection during the trials and temptations which she would most probably be exposed to in after-life. Mrs. Barratt loved Blanche as her own daughter; and bitter indeed was the parting between governess and pupil, when that kind-hearted woman left Throseby a few months previously, her services being no longer required by Mrs. Harcourt.

"Dear, kind Mrs. Barratt," exclaimed Blanche,

sobbing and crying at her departure, "you must promise to come and live with me, when I am married, or become mistress of my own property —indeed you must. I shall never be happy without you."

"My dear child," replied Mrs. Barratt, "you know little now of the duties and trials of married life; your husband would never consent to such an arrangement as you propose, and it would then be your duty to conform to his wishes—I would not say commands—as every wife should obey her husband."

"Then, dear Mrs. Barratt, I will never marry till I can find one who will love me for myself alone, and love all those I love—kind-hearted and affectionate like yourself—who will yield to all my reasonable desires, and endeavour to make me, as I should him, truly happy."

"Marriage is a great lottery, dear Blanche, and I would earnestly caution you against accepting any man, however handsome or agreeable—however rich, or talented, or titled—unless you have an opportunity of thoroughly ascertaining

his true character. 'Never marry in haste, and repent at leisure.' Your large fortune will attract many pretended admirers, men of the world, to whom love, in its true meaning, is utterly unknown; and when once in possession of your fortune, they might treat you with indifference and neglect. Indeed, my dear, dear child, a young girl with a large fortune stands in a much worse position, in regard to her prospects of happiness in the married state, than one who has nothing beyond her own mental and personal attractions. Among all your neighbours, there is not any gentleman I know in the least degree calculated to make you happy, except one, and he, I fear, is too high-minded and fastidious in his ideas about money, ever to aspire to the hand of the heiress; that person, my dear child, is William Beauchamp. He is fond of hunting, because it is a bold, manly amusement, in many respects resembling war; and had he adopted the army as a profession, the name of William Beauchamp would have stood conspicuous in his country's defence. With the most chivalrous

feelings of honour, a deep sense of religion, a firm and unshaken resolution, and one of the most kind and loving hearts that ever beat in human breast, the woman who shall marry William Beauchamp will draw a prize indeed."

"Dear Mrs. Barratt," replied Blanche, "I believe William to be all you represent him, and you know I consider him and Constance as my brother and sister."

"Yes, dear child, glad I am to leave you with two such friends, to whom I can safely entrust your happiness; prize them, love them, dearest Blanche, as I know they love you, and never keep a secret from your sister Constance, who will ever direct and guide you in the path of duty and religion; and now farewell, my own long-loved, dearest child, and may Heaven protect you from every evil, and that greatest of all evils, a bad husband," when, straining her to her breast once more, Mrs. Barratt rushed from the room, and poor Blanche sank helpless in her chair, convulsed with sobs and sorrow, where she sat crying until her maid Alice entered, and

exerted all her entreaties and kind offices to soothe and comfort her almost broken-hearted young lady.

"Oh, my dear mistress," cried Alice, kneeling at her feet, "pray, do not give way thus," (at the same time wiping with her apron the tears trickling down her own cheeks). "Poor, dear, kind Mrs. Barratt, we shall all miss her so," and she began sobbing herself, as if her heart would break. "Oh, Miss Blanche, this will be a sad day—but there, I declare, is Mrs. Harcourt's step coming this way," which roused the two young girls to check their emotions.

"Why, Blanche," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, witnessing the traces of her grief, "I thought you possessed too high a sense of decorum to give way to such sobs and lamentations, and in the presence of your servant; indeed, you ought to rejoice at Mrs. Barratt's good fortune, in having, through your aunt Gordon's recommendation, obtained such a desirable situation as companion to old Mrs. Dacre, where she will have nothing whatever to do."

"I cannot, dear aunt," replied Blanche, still sobbing, "refrain from grieving at the loss I have sustained in dear Mrs. Barratt, who has ever been to me a second mother; but if you will leave me, I will endeavour to be more composed."

"Well, my dear, make haste, and wash away all traces of your tears, for I expect some visitors this morning, and you must be in the drawing-room to help me to receive them."

Mrs. Harcourt was one of those cold, unapproachable beings, living within the frigid zone, repellent alike, and impervious to every genial influence; in fact, she belonged to that numerous class denominated *the imperturbables*, who consider it a breach of decorum to be affected by those common occurrences which exercise so foolish an influence over the generality of the human race. Excess of grief for the loss of friends and relations, or excess of joy at their recovery, in her ideas, betrayed a weakness of mind in those who could indulge in such wayward fancies, and decidedly at variance with the rules of propriety and etiquette to be ob-

served, without exception, upon all occasions. She was one of those persons who would, if engaged in the Satanical pastime of table-turning and table-rapping, have stood as a six foot thick wall to prevent any rotatory motion of the said table towards herself, possessing not one atom of electricity in her whole composition.

Blanche Douglas, it need scarcely be said, unfortunately for her own peace of mind and individual happiness, was a native of the torrid zone, and therefore the very opposite in disposition and character to Mrs. Harcourt. Like the young offshoot of a vine, stretching forth its tender and pliant tendrils for support, this young, warm-hearted girl (when bereft of the mainstay of her childhood, in the person of Mrs. Barratt) looked around for one to whom she could cling for comfort and sympathy in her feelings, and love with the intensity of her deep and abiding attachment. In Constance she had found a firm and warm friend, to whom, as a sister, she could communicate all her joys and sorrows; but her feelings towards William

Beauchamp had become almost unintelligible to herself for some time past, Mrs. Barratt's remarks occasioning a shyness and embarrassment in her manner towards him, not before experienced, when viewing him (which she had from an early age) as her brother only. The veil was now withdrawn—she knew that she loved, with the ardour of her first purest affections him to whom she could cling through life, as women only can and do cling to the husband of their choice.

On retreating to her room after her return from Mrs. Compton's ball, Blanche carefully examined her pretty little basket of flowers (Beauchamp's present), and every word and look of his were recalled to her mind, as, pressing it to her lips, she imprinted a fond kiss upon its glittering surface.

"Yes, dear William," she exclaimed, "I will indeed treasure this little trinket for your sake, although you are seldom absent from my thoughts, and your love to me is far beyond all earthly treasures."

CHAPTER IX.

The breakfast at Mr. Compton's, after the ball, presented a striking contrast to that of Marston Castle. All faces beamed with happy smiles and joyous good humour, induced by the kind reception they experienced from the master and mistress of Brockley House, who welcomed friends and strangers alike to partake of their hospitality. Opposite to the breakfast-room windows on the lawn were congregated about three hundred pheasants, called together by the keeper's whistle, and enjoying their breakfast also.

"Ah!" remarked Mrs. Compton, playfully to Bob Conyers, whose eyes were riveted on the game, "I judge what your feelings are in witnessing this formidable array of your enemies; but come, I will make you a bet of five shillings that there is one of your friends lurking in that bed of laurels, not twenty yards from the spot where the pheasants are now feeding."

"Thank you, my dear madam, for your kind offer of relieving my pocket of its contents, which may possibly amount to the sum you have named, and which I should most certainly lose, were I rash enough to accept such a wager. As we are all well aware of your and Mr. Compton's liberality in catering for your friends in pink jackets, there is no person to whom I could hand over five shillings with less reluctance than to yourself; but as my purse is not on any day of the week inconveniently burdened with the coin of the realm, and on hunting-days contains only sufficient for the contingencies which may occur, such as a feed of corn and bucket of gruel for my horse, probably a lost shoe or two,

and a glass of brandy and water for myself, with a few little extras for ostler and turnpikes on my road to and from hunting, I could not venture on such a hazard as an even bet, although I would not refuse four to one, which I think are the fair odds against a fox being found in that bed of laurels."

"There, Mr. Conyers, look there," cried a little girl, running up to him, "there is the fox just peeping out from the laurels."

"By Jove, my darling!" exclaimed Bob, taking the child up in his arms and kissing her, "you have just saved me from losing a shilling to your mamma, which, by the way, I dare say, is very provoking to her; but to pacify her anger, you may whisper to her that Bob's *annual*, on Christmas Day, will make some amends for her disappointment."

"Tell me what *my* present is to be," said the child.

"No, my dear, you must wait patiently till the basket arrives."

"Really, Mr. Conyers," exclaimed Mrs.

Compton, "it is very provoking to see how you spoil my children; they are quite unmanageable when you are here, and I really think I must forbid you the house, or they will be entirely ruined."

"If indulgence is to cause this," returned Bob, "I think their mamma will have much more to answer for than Bob Conyers."

"Well, Mr. Conyers, we are all now impatient to begin our day's sport, which we can see from the terrace; so give a hint to William Beauchamp, or these increasing new comers will soon clear off our stock of old cherry brandy."

"Thank you for the hint," replied Conyers, "as I have not yet had my glass of jumping powder."

The hounds having arrived, Mr. Compton's guests quickly dispersed in search of their steeds; the lion of the day, on whom all eyes were turned being a great Leicestershire squire, who had for many years hunted that country with a splendid pack of fox-hounds, but was now settled down

on his own patrimonial estates. It being one of his maxims, that every fence was practicable with a fall; it is almost needless to say, he was a bold and fearless rider, and that no obstacle ever stopped him. In stature, he was about the general standard, with a broad, expansive chest, and features, if not handsome, yet manly, reflecting the spirit, which was working within, of cool determination and undaunted courage. His seat on horseback was neither studied nor graceful, but easy and careless as his manner of riding across country, to which may be attributed many of the severe falls he encountered; which were of such continued occurrence that he never appeared quite satisfied without his general allowance of half-a-dozen per diem.

"Oh, demmit," exclaimed Markham, who had been listening to a recital of the great squire's exploits, retailed by Vernon, "what a confounded fire-eating monster he looks! he'll pound us all to day, and ride away from Burnett and Beauchamp too."

"I hope so," replied Vernon, "and that both of them may break their necks in trying to catch him."

"Eh! indeed, Dick, you're a nice member of the hunt, aint you, to wish every man of us to be beaten by a stranger; but I'll just bet you an even five pounds, he don't beat Will Beauchamp or Burnett."

"Done, Markham, and I'll make it ten, if you like."

"Take him at his word," cried Sir Lucius Gwynne, who overheard the conversation, "and I'll go halves with you."

"Done, then, Vernon," exclaimed the Captain; "Gwynne's witness to the bet."

"And now," said Sir Lucius, "I'll bet you two to one on Beauchamp against the great Leicestershire man; will you have it, Vernon?"

"No, I thank you," was the reply, "I shall take no more on that event to-day; but who is to decide?"

"We will have Burnett," said Gwynne, "you

can choose Tyler, or any other first-flight man you prefer to him."

All being now mounted and ready for action, the hounds were thrown into the evergreens near the house, and in a moment, the fox broke across the lawn. Dashing through the stable-yard below and some out-buildings, which screened him from view, he immediately sank into the vale, taking his line through the most formidable fences of the whole country. Will Beauchamp and his whipper-in Charley were with the hounds, as usual, but had not crossed more than three fields, before the great hero was down upon them, at full speed, and going at a small brook, as if a river were in his way.

"He'll catch it there," cried Charley to his master, as the great squire and his horse went floundering into the stream; "I should have thought, sir, a man of his business habits had know'd what boggy ground meant afore to-day; but come along, sir, there's plenty to help him out;" and, sooth to say, there were about a dozen of the "finest fellows in the world" in the same

predicament, with their horses up to their hocks, struggling in the mire. Sir Francis, however, had the sense to avoid the trap, and followed in the track of Will Beauchamp, who with Charley kept the lead with the hounds, until they ran into their fox, in an open grass field, after a burst of thirty-five minutes, without a check. Sir Francis, Tyler, Gwynne, and Fred Beauchamp were the four next up, and close behind them came the lion of the day, hot and furious.

"Confound that bog!" he exclaimed, "it spoilt my start completely, and you know, Burnett, five minutes lost are hard to recover in a quick thing like this; but I'll take care the hounds don't get out of my sight with our second fox."

"Don't make too sure of that," replied Sir Francis; "we are not in Leicestershire now, but one of the stiffest vales I ever crossed yet, where hounds can, and will, beat the horses."

"They can't beat me," replied the great squire.

"They have done it once already, and will do

it again, I hope," rejoined Burnett, "that is, if the scent holds as good with the next fox we find."

By this time the Captain and Vernon had reached the spot, when the former appealed to Gwynne about his bet.

"You have won this heat clearly enough, Markham," replied Sir Lucius, "as Beauchamp had his fox in hand five minutes at least before the great man showed at all, and four of us were before him."

"Eh! Vernon, 'pon honour, no mistake about it—lost your money, old fellow, but come I'll let you off for a five pound note—demmed liberal offer, eh?"

"I won't take it, Markham, for I feel certain of winning, as an accident only prevented my man being in his proper place, where he is sure to be, the next run."

"Oh, very well," replied the Captain, "as you please."

The hounds were now taken to one of the finest fox coverts in the world, a large hazel

coppice of about one hundred acres, situated in the centre of a fine grass country, with large open pasture fields. "Ah!" exclaimed the Leicestershire squire, "this is something like a hunting country, with plenty of room to fall, without half a score fellows being in upon a man when he's down. Now, Burnett, we may fancy ourselves at Billesdon again."

"With this difference only," replied Sir Francis, "that there we can take our fences at a fly, here it cannot be done, with a wide ditch on both sides and a big thundering bank and quickset in the middle."

"I shall try it, notwithstanding," rejoined the squire.

"Then you don't see our second fox killed, that's settled; but, hark, by Jove! they have found him." And with a scream, which thrilled through the hearts of all, Will Beauchamp viewed him over the ride. In a moment the whole pack was at work, rattling him round the covert.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the great squire, "how those big brutes stick to him! Gad, sir,

they squeak like terriers, light enough in their tongue—eh, Burnett!"

"Yes, there's little cry with them, and when they run hard, you can scarcely hear them at all; tip and go is their motto, and I've seen them run half a mile with their fox in view, without a hound giving tongue. But look, they are away at the bottom of the covert, while we are standing here.

"Now for it, then," cried Sir Francis, as sticking his spurs into his horse, he dashed down the nearest drive; but Beauchamp, with his whip Charley, had got the start, and kept the lead for three miles of very severe country, until the hounds were brought to a check on the banks of a deep brook; where the fox, having been headed by a man at work in the field opposite, had doubled back and thrown them into some little confusion. At this moment the Leicestershire squire made his entrée into the field, in rather an unceremonious manner, by being thrown head foremost from his saddle over a high bank; with his horse scrambling after

him. Beauchamp, hearing the crash behind, him, turned and asked if he was hurt.

"Hurt!" he exclaimed—"No—*I* am not often hurt by a fall; but now, we are even, sir," addressing Beauchamp, as the hounds settled again on the scent, "so come along"—and he rode savagely at the brook, cheering Beauchamp to follow. Our young master, with Charley, were quickly by his side, when the great man, thinking to pound them, rode at some stiff post and rails against the hill, which his horse, having the wind knocked out of him already, was unable to clear; and, breaking the top rail, again gave his master a severe fall.

"Thank you," said Beauchamp, as he passed the prostrate squire, "for letting me over so easy."

"I am not beaten yet," was the retort, as he once more jumped into his saddle; and, rendered furious by the fall, he rode desperately at a new five-barred gate, over which he fell heavily into a hard turnpike road, his horse also lying stunned on his back.

"Now sir," said Beauchamp, jumping from

his saddle, "you are hurt, or ought to be—pray, let me assist you."

"Oh, never mind me," faintly ejaculated the squire, "this is deuced hard falling ground; but confound that rascally groom of mine for mounting me on a horse not fit to go. I'll discharge him this very night. Thank you, Mr. Beauchamp, for your attention. I am all right again now, pray go on with your hounds. I will soon be with you."

Bob Conyers and others now coming up, Beauchamp whispered to him a few words about the great man's fall, and rode away to catch his hounds, which, by the way, he never could, until, with Charley alone, they had killed their second fox among the laurels on Mr. Compton's lawn, on the very spot where they had found their first in the morning—Beauchamp, with his horse quite fresh from his short respite, when assisting the fallen hero, went rapidly away from the rest (whose horses were already in distress from the pace up to the road) and was standing on the lawn with the hounds (the fox

being suspended in a tree) baying around, at least five minutes before any other horseman made his appearance; Mr. and Mrs. Compton, with the children and all the domestics, enjoying the scene.

To Beauchamp's surprise, the first man up was Markham, who exclaimed, "Eh! aw! Beauchamp, 'pon honour, gave 'em all the slip—hurrah!—awful pace, 'pon my soul, all right—won my bet!"

"But what a figure you are, Markham! Where's your hat?"

"In the brook, old fellow, where I left half-a-dozen with their horses; got out myself on the right side; up the hill like wildfire; passed the great man on the road—very squeamish indeed; cut into an old lane, leaving Burnett, Tyler, and Gwynne rasping away cross country to my right, and here I am, first for once in my life; and now, Beauchamp, give me the brush, which I would not lose for a five-pound note."

"I have promised it to Mrs. Compton,"

replied Beauchamp, "who was the first in at the finish."

"Then," replied that lady, "I willingly waive my claim in favour of Captain Markham, as a little compensation for the loss of his hat."

"Thank you, Mrs. Compton, for your kind consideration," replied the Captain, with a low bow; and the said appendage was accordingly handed to him by Charley, who pocketed a sovereign for the present.

"Won ten yellow boys, to-day," whispered the Captain.

"How so, sir?" inquired Charley.

"By your master beating the Leicestershire hero."

"Glad to hear it, sir; wish you had won fifty."

"Have you seen anything of Rushton?" inquired Mrs. Compton.

"Oh, yaas," replied Markham; "left him on the road; bad fall—ribs smashed, I suspect, or something of that sort—looked seedy—very."

"I hope not seriously hurt," said Mrs. Compton, anxiously.

"Oh, no, can't be—never *is* hurt, by his own account—only queerish."

Preceded by Sir Francis, Tyler, Fred Beauchamp, Gwynne, and Conyers, who were in the first flight, the lion of the day now hove in sight, looking unutterably disgusted; in fact, his whole frame had received so great a shock from his heavy fall on the hard road, that, although no bones were broken, he was fearfully bruised about his head, ribs, and right arm, which was nearly paralyzed. Giving his horse to the groom, with sundry anathemas for his want of condition, the great man walked on to the lawn, where he stood for a few moments talking with Mrs. Compton, and then retired to his own room for the luxury of a warm bath.

The fox was now thrown to the hounds, as the heavy weights, including Sir Lionel, Squire Beauchamp, and others, with whom Vernon had been in company, arrived on the scene, and

many and hearty were the congratulations on their capital day's sport.

"Ah, Compton!" exclaimed Conyers, "we have always luck on our side, when we meet at your place—no bagmen or three-legged ones here; and now for a glass of sherry to drink your health and a merry Christmas to all your family, with fifty new years to come, and may they find you still living as heretofore—the friend of fox-hunters."

"And a right hearty welcome to you all," replied Mr. Compton, who led the way into the house, followed by a goodly company of pink jackets, who gladly availed themselves of his proffered hospitality. Markham whispered Gwynne, "A hollow thing, eh?—No mistake about first man."

"None whatever—Vernon must pay."

"All right, old fellow—tell him what you say."

The losing man did not relish the Captain's hint; but knowing his good nature, put him off by saying they would settle that another day.

"Play and pay, Vernon, is the rule on such occasions," said Markham, "so you must fork out; had I lost, you would have made me pay quickly enough."

"Oh, very well, I'll send you a draft to-morrow or next day," with which he turned aside.

On their way home, a comparison was instituted by Sir Francis and Conyers, between the riding of the two rival masters of fox-hounds, Rushton and Will Beauchamp.

"In Leicestershire," remarked Burnett, "I think Beauchamp would give way to the great squire."

"I don't think he would," retorted Conyers; "for this reason: Will rides with equal science and superior judgment to the other; he is always with his hounds, in and out of covert, and is exceedingly quick, without ever being in a flurry. See how quietly he creeps along, always selecting the best ground for his horse, whose resources he husbands to the utmost, with neither whip nor spur to harass or frighten

him. Again, when approaching a large fence, he pulls his horse into a trot, if necessary, to give him wind and strength to clear it, easing or lifting him, as occasion may require. The falls he gets are very few and far between, yet he is, as a huntsman ought to be, always with his hounds; and as to his seat in the saddle, he is a perfect centaur, man and horse appear as one animal."

"That's all very true, Conyers," replied Burnett; "Will Beauchamp is a difficult man to beat in his own country, with his horses so thoroughly made to their master's hand, and at banks and stiff fences they are perfectly at home; but in Leicestershire those horses would cut a poor figure, where it is going from first to last without the hope of pulling up for a second; nothing but thorough-bred ones can live with hounds there."

"Very likely, Burnett, I don't dispute that point; but this I will maintain, that Will Beauchamp, equally well horsed, shall beat your hero in his own country six days out of ten through-

out the season. Your man is fast and furious, but in my opinion not a thorough good rider, which no one ought to be called who gets such an extraordinary number of falls in a season; this, although a proof of daring, bull-dog courage, is no proof, but just the reverse, of good horsemanship."

"Well, Conyers, there is a good deal of sterling truth in your remarks, and, I must add, no man entertains a better opinion than I do of Will Beauchamp; so now, as our roads diverge, good night."

CHAPTER X.

Bob Conyers was not in words merely, but in deeds also, the firm friend of Will Beauchamp; and accordingly on the following Tuesday, we find him at Throseby Hall, sitting with Mrs. Harcourt in her drawing-room, in the hope of eliciting some information about the invitation to Marston Castle, which he knew had been received the previous day; but that lady evincing no disposition to enlighten him on the subject, Conyers hazarded an experiment at drawing the badger, which fully succeeded, by saying—"I have promised Blanche another riding lesson,

and if she is not otherwise engaged, will come over on Thursday morning for that purpose."

"We shall not be at home that day," was the reply.

"Oh, very well, the next morning then," said Bob.

"We shall be absent, I fear, that day also," replied Mrs. Harcourt.

"Oh, then, I will find Blanche, and give her a lesson now, which will do just as well—there she is, walking in the garden." And without more ado, Bob took up his hat, and left the room. In a few minutes he was walking by her side to the stables, and having ordered her horse to be saddled, she returned to the house to put on her habit, whilst Bob entered the drawing-room.

"I do not quite approve," began Mrs. Harcourt, "of Blanche riding."

"It is the most healthful recreation in the world, my dear madam," replied Bob, "and strongly recommended to your niece by your own physician, as the means of giving her exer-

cise and the benefit of the air, without much fatigue."

"Yes, I believe, in moderation it is very well, but I dread her becoming a second Selina Markham."

"Then she must change her character entirely," said Bob, "and I never wish Blanche to ride after the fox-hounds; in fact, to tell you the truth, my dear madam, I do not approve of ladies going out hunting."

"Yet Constance does?"

"Oh, no, merely to see the hounds throw off, and then return home; but Blanche is even too timid for that; and certainly I shall never advise her to do anything of the kind, although most husbands, and particularly those of the aristocracy, like to see their wives with a good seat on horseback, to parade them in Rotten Row during the London season; and who knows but Blanche may one day become a countess?" At these words, the lady in question entered the room, and they at once set out for their ride.

When they had passed the lodge gates,

Blanche, who had overheard his last words in the drawing-room, enquired what he was saying to Mrs. Harcourt about a countess.

"Why, my dear Blanche," said Bob, "your aunt Harcourt intends you shall become a duchess, or a countess, at least."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Conyers, don't, pray, talk so foolishly."

"Well, then, let me ask, are you not going to-morrow to spend a few days at Marston?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Has such an invitation ever been sent before to Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt and yourself?"

"No, I think not."

"Ah," replied Bob, "I see it all."

"What do you see, Mr. Conyers?"

"I will tell you, dear Blanche, on one condition, that you do not reveal what I say to any human being."

"I should never think of doing so," replied Blanche.

"Very well; you will find at Marston Castle a certain nobleman, called Lord Vancourt, who

will pay you great attention, and whom your aunt will try and persuade you to marry."

Blanche blushed scarlet at this information, and said—"This is very improbable, Mr. Conyers!"

"Is Bob Conyers a false prophet, Miss Douglas? But now, mark me, if you do not meet this Lord, if he does not pay you the greatest attentions, and within a very short time propose for you, you may then call me one. They have laid a trap to catch you, my dear girl; and Captain Melville told me at Compton's ball the other night, that a more unprincipled scoundrel (those were his expressions) than this same Lord Vancourt does not exist; and now your old friend and master having done his duty in warning you of the net set to catch you, he has only one word more to say on the subject, and that one word is—*beware!*"

"Oh, Mr. Conyers," said the young girl, almost in tears, "how can I repay you for your ever kind interest in my welfare?"

"It would be strange indeed," replied he, "if

I did not take an interest, and a deep one too, in that sweet girl I have so often nursed when a child, who has neither father nor brother to watch over and protect her; and I am fearful your guardian is too worldly-minded to consult your true happiness (which ought to be his chief consideration) in settling you in life; in fact, I know well that both he and Mrs. Harcourt are resolved on forming some brilliant matrimonial alliance for you amongst the nobility, to which rank they think you have a right to aspire. Perceiving that such are their intentions, as your sincere friend, I wish to caution you to consult your own inclinations before their wishes, and never to be persuaded to marry any man, however high in rank, unless his character and disposition are such as to ensure your happiness. Now, dear Blanche, my lecture is finished, for which you may perhaps think old Bob Conyers a fool; but I could not rest happy until I had told you my suspicions, and given you my advice."

"Indeed, Mr. Conyers," said Blanche, "I

feel most grateful for your kindness on this and many more occasions, and I shall ever regard you as one of my best friends."

"Well, whenever you want my advice or assistance, do not hesitate a moment, dear Blanche, in applying to me; but our conversation to-day must be kept a secret from Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt; and do not mention that you heard of Lord Vancourt being expected at Marston, or they will accuse me of intermeddling in what does not concern me."

"You may depend I shall never reveal what you tell me in confidence." After which they proceeded on their ride.

A select party had been asked to meet Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt on the day of their arrival at Marston Castle; besides the guests staying in the house, two of whom were Mr. Harley and his sister, a matronly personage of about forty, clever, well-informed, and chatty, who, having received her instructions from her brother, was fully prepared to laud Lord Vancourt to the skies; in fact, there was what is termed a

packed jury of ladies and gentlemen, carefully chosen by Lord Mervyn from the class *sycophantic*, who never ventured to hold an opinion on any matter adverse to his lordship's,—Tyler and Vernon being included.

Lord Vancourt, who had arrived that day, was about twenty-eight years of age, tall, standing over six feet, with a very good, well-proportioned figure, decidedly handsome, of rather aristocratic-looking features, and an aquiline nose. He had also a profusion of curly black hair, with very bushy eyebrows; but there was a sinister expression in the eye, which revealed much of his true character. In disposition, he was naturally haughty, overbearing, passionate, and uncompromising; but having mixed a great deal in good society, his manners were highly polished, and he had the art of rendering himself most agreeable to ladies, with whom he carefully repressed all indications of ill-temper or impatience.

During the dinner hour, having travelled a great deal, he related in a pleasant, unostenta-

tious manner his various adventures by sea and land, and even Blanche, notwithstanding Bob's warning, thought him the most agreeable man she had ever met; there was, however, a peculiar expression sometimes in his eyes, so searching and almost fierce, that she felt frightened when they were riveted on her.

On the ladies retiring to the drawing-room, Mrs. Harcourt, who had been exceedingly pleased with Lord Vancourt, could not suppress her expressions of admiration, to which Miss Harley fully assented, declaring him a most charming, delightful person, so well informed and unaffected, although of such superior manners and high talents,—"In short, my dear Madam," said that crafty lady, "Lord Vancourt is quite the ton in the highest circles in town, and eagerly sought after, also, on account of his splendid fortune."

"Is it not surprising then," enquired Mrs. Harcourt, "that he is still unmarried?"

"Oh, not in the least; his Lordship is so very particular in his choice, fearing he may be

accepted on account of his title and fortune, and I think it most probable, with his romantic ideas about women and marriage, that he will assume the disguise of a walking tourist some day, in search of a country damsel, and marry her for love only."

This artful speech struck home to Mrs. Harcourt, who thought secretly that he would be just the match to suit her niece. Among the company that evening were the Rollestons, who had brought with them Captain Melville; and Caroline Rolleston was sitting with Blanche, when Miss Harley was passing such high eulogiums on Lord Vancourt.

"Good heavens!" said Caroline, "how can that woman go on telling such stories about Lord Vancourt, who is one of the most gay, dissipated men about town, and as poor as a country curate; and they do say, my dear—(in a whisper)—already married to an opera dancer; but the latter is a secret, which Melville let fall one day, quite unintentionally, and therefore it may be treason to mention it."

" Do you think that can really be true ?" enquired Blanche.

" Indeed, I do—Captain Melville is a person above the suspicion of uttering a falsehood; and did you observe, before dinner, when Lord Vancourt approached to shake hands with him, that he drew back, making him a very low bow ?"

" Perhaps they may have had some quarrel," observed Blanche.

" Most likely," replied Caroline, " since no two men can be of more opposite ideas; but papa says that Captain Melville is a perfect gentleman, and of most honourable feelings."

As they were discussing these points, the gentlemen entered the room; for Lord Mervyn having observed there was something amiss, between his protegé, Lord Vancourt, and Captain Melville, proposed their joining the ladies, very early, before any unpleasantry could occur.

Lord Vancourt, dreading some exposure from Melville, avoided the heiress that evening, for fear of exciting his remarks, devoting himself chiefly to Lady Mervyn, whilst Melville en-

deavoured to do the agreeable to Miss Douglas. The evening (with Lord Mervyn's dark looks, which exercised a decided influence over the greater part of the company), passed uncomfortably enough to all except Melville, who was quite enchanted with Blanche, thinking her the most lovely, unaffected girl he had ever been acquainted with.

The next and three following days, Lord Vancourt paid very assiduous attention to the heiress, for which every opportunity was afforded him by Lord and Lady Mervyn; Mr. Harley and his sister pursuing a like plan with Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, by always speaking of Lord Vancourt in the highest terms.

Poor Blanche was much more frightened than gratified by his Lordship's close attendance upon her during the live-long day; but her timid, bashful manner, with downcast eyes and blushing cheek, when his glance met hers, led his Lordship to the conclusion that he had made a most decided and favourable impression upon the heart of the youthful

heiress, and that the game was now safe in his own hands.

It is quite true that more facilities are afforded to love-making in a quiet country house, during one week, than may occur in a twelvemonth under different circumstances, with the chance of meeting at a dinner party or a ball occasionally; which, with so many interruptions and lookers-on, is comparatively a tedious process, and must take a due allowance of time. So prosperously had Vancourt advanced already in the opinion of the conspirators, Mervyn, Vernon, and Harley, that they considered the prize as nearly won, and that he had only now to offer his hand to be accepted; forgetting the old adage of "there being many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip."

Lord Vancourt objected, however, to such precipitancy; avowing his belief that too much haste would spoil the whole affair.

"Strike while the iron is hot, is my advice," said Vernon.

"You are mistaken," replied Vancourt, "the iron is not half hot yet, and that girl is so timid

that I cannot get on with her as I have done with other women, and see clearly I must take more time with one of her reserved disposition, and lure her on step by step."

"Well," remarked Harley, "your Lordship is a better judge of such matters than I pretend to be; and being the chief person concerned, you have the best reason to act as you think most conducive to your own ends."

The Harcourts had been invited to spend a week at Marston, but on the fifth morning a letter arrived from Lord Malcolm, saying he should arrive that same day at Throseby Hall, which obliged Mr. Harcourt to curtail his visit very suddenly, and return home immediately, much to Blanche's delight; who, on the plea of a head-ache, could not be induced to leave her room till the carriage was at the door. During her stay at the castle, whether out walking with Miss Mervyn, or taking a drive in the pony carriage, when the weather would admit, Lord Vancourt contrived to be constantly by her side, Vernon attaching himself to Miss Mervyn;

and in their rambles about the grounds, he kept that young lady at a sufficient distance from Blanche, that Vancourt might have every facility for ingratiating himself into her favour; but the thing was overdone, and Blanche having been left several times in this manner by Miss Mervyn, her suspicions were fairly excited by this oft-repeated trick, and Lord Vancourt's increased *empressement* of manner and language, which even her artless nature could not misunderstand. Blanche Douglas (even if her heart had been entirely free) was a person of such delicate and refined feelings, that Lord Vancourt's conduct (being an acquaintance of only a few days) was becoming quite irksome to her; and for the last day she had avoided being left alone with him, pleading indisposition to remain in her room until the dinner hour.

Vernon, however, had met with a very different reception from Miss Mervyn, who had fallen desperately in love with him; and thus, whilst apparently playing Lord Mervyn's game, he had been, in fact, most industriously dealing

his own cards, and obtained a confession from Miss Mervyn of her attachment, which, as a matter of course, was to remain a profound secret for the present.

On their return to Throseby, the Harcourts found Lord Malcolm, who had arrived just before them, and Blanche was in high spirits on again meeting her cousin.

"Why, dear Blanche, you are wonderfully improved within the last year—become quite the woman. Well, girls do run up in an extraordinary manner, and I suppose you must now be called Miss Douglas."

"Never by you, Charles, I hope," she replied, "or by any of my true friends."

"Well, dear girl, I am delighted to find you looking so lovely and so happy; but tell me (in a whisper), how is Constance?"

"As beautiful as ever, or more so," she replied, laughing; "but we have been staying at that disagreeable place, Marston Castle, nearly a week, and therefore I have seen nothing of her during that time."

"Well, then, Blanche, we will ride over to Bampton the day after to-morrow."

"Why not to-morrow, Charles?"

"It won't do, my dear; old Harcourt would take offence at my leaving him the first day; and besides, I think to-morrow is Beauchamp's hunting day, and I long to shake him by the hand; for, between ourselves, Blanche, my love for Constance has arisen partly from my love and esteem for her brother, who is a man after my own heart."

During the latter part of this speech, Blanche, feeling a little colour spreading over her cheek, turned away, and ran upstairs to change her dress.

The next day, while Lord Malcolm was sitting with Mrs. Harcourt and Blanche in the drawing-room, Lord Vancourt was announced, who remained for nearly an hour, paying very pointed attention to Miss Douglas. When he left, Mrs. Harcourt asked Malcolm—

"What do you think of Lord Vancourt?—

Is he not most polished and agreeable, and strikingly handsome?"

"All that I admit, yet I don't like him."

"Why?" inquired Mrs. Harcourt.

"I can't say exactly, but he has an expression to me quite repulsive, and from which I should set him down as haughty and bad-tempered."

"Oh, that is only your fancy, Malcolm."

"Perhaps so, but I shall not alter my opinion until I know more of him."

No further remarks were made by Mrs. Harcourt, who did not wish Blanche to be prejudiced against Lord Vancourt, in case her cousin should not now come forward, as was expected. But when Blanche and Malcolm went out afterwards for a walk, the latter remarked upon his lordship's attentions to her, and said—

"I perceive Lord Vancourt is a great admirer of yours, my fair cousin, and first favourite on the list, I should think, from your tell-tale

blushes and downcast eyes, when he was addressing you."

"Indeed, Charles, he is no favourite of mine; and although extremely pleasing, yet I feel quite frightened in his company."

"Oh, that feeling may wear off on more intimate acquaintance," rejoined Malcolm; "but first impressions with me are not easily effaced; and I tell you candidly, dear Blanche, I fear he will make a bad husband, so don't decide in his favour until you have seen more of the world, and a great deal more of Lord Vancourt. You will have plenty to pick and choose from, with your large fortune; so take my advice, don't be in a hurry to marry yet."

"Indeed I shall not, Charles; and I am quite sure Lord Vancourt would never be my choice."

"Very well, Blanche, wait till next spring, when you come out in town, and I will introduce you to two or three of our young nobility, equally good-looking, with better connections than Lord Vancourt, and really good fellows into the bargain."

At breakfast, next morning, Malcolm expressed his intention of taking Blanche with him to call at Bampton, to which no objection was raised, as Mrs. Harcourt wished to throw no obstacles in the way of the two cousins being together. Lord Malcolm was rejoiced to find his friend Beauchamp at home, and the meeting between his Lordship and Constance was what might be expected from two affianced lovers, in which relation they stood to each other, although it was not generally known. Leaving the two girls together, Beauchamp and his friend, who was very fond of hunting, walked off to inspect the kennels and stables, and Lord Malcolm could not help remarking on Beauchamp's altered manner and grave looks.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired his friend; "all your buoyancy of spirits is gone; are you in love, Beauchamp, or what is it?"

"Oh, I'm only a little out of sorts to-day."

"Come, come, Beauchamp, that will not pass with me—I know you too well; surely you can trust your own brother elect with

anything that lies heavy at your heart. Many a secret have I confided to your keeping, and now, my dear fellow, I expect the same confidence from you. No evasion, if you love me as I do you."

Beauchamp, thus pressed, confessed his long-growing attachment to Blanche, and reproached himself for having made her acquainted with his love at Mrs. Compton's ball. "That has hung heavy upon me ever since," he added, "for I feel I have done wrong in trying to gain her affections before entering on the world, when she will, of course, see so many, far my superiors in birth, endowments, and fortune; in short, Malcolm, I have no pretensions to one so far beyond my deserts; and then the idea of being called a fortune-hunter haunts me day and night. I have become miserable; what to do, I know not; will you advise me?"

"Yes, Beauchamp, most willingly, when you have answered me one question. Were Blanche Douglas no heiress, would you lay open your heart to her?"

"Yes, Malcolm, for I am sure I can never love another; yet I would still leave her disengaged to me for a twelvemonth."

"Why so?"

"Because I think she is too young to be tied to any such serious engagement, until she has seen more of the world."

"Hah!" said Lord Malcolm, "this is self-denial to excess, and few, except Will Beauchamp, could argue thus against themselves. Well, I will consider these points to-night, and advise you how to act to-morrow; and now let us have some luncheon, after which you and Constance must ride part of the way home with us."

Beauchamp raising some objection to this proposal, was met by Malcolm with these words—"Don't make a greater simpleton of yourself than you have already this morning, in making these silly confessions, or I shall lose all my patience! Come along directly, and order the horses, for I want an opportunity of making love to Constance, if you do not to Blanche."

After luncheon, the party set out for Throseby, but as the road admitted of two only abreast, it is superfluous to say how the two couples were arranged. Lord Malcolm was in high spirits—unpleasantly so to Beauchamp, who, being completely under the influence of the blues, exhibited a sad contrast to his more happy friend; and as he rode thoughtful and abstracted by the side of Blanche, she could not fail to notice his altered looks and manner; still he was, as usual, most friendly, giving her some useful hints in regard to the management of her horse, and speaking on all other subjects except the one nearest to his heart. At first, Blanche was timid and fearful of a repetition of some love professions; but seeing his determination to avoid all such topics, her reserve wore off.

"I hear," he said, "you have been staying at Marston Castle; were you pleased with your visit?"

"Oh, no," she replied, "Lord and Lady Mervyn are, in my opinion, very stiff, formal, disagreeable people."

"Did you meet no pleasant persons there?" he enquired; "I heard the house was full of company."

"Yes, there was a Lord Vancourt, very agreeable and good-looking, resembling much in manners Mr. Vernon, who was there also; but I must confess I was delighted when our visit was over."

"Then you did not admire this Lord Vancourt, of whom report speaks so highly as a perfect ladies' man?"

"Oh, no," replied Blanche, "he is the counterpart of Mr. Vernon, whom, you know, I dislike exceedingly."

Beauchamp breathed more freely after this confession from Blanche, and some of his usual frank gaiety of looks and manners returned.

"You, of course, mean to attend our grand ball on the 31st of this month?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "you know I make my *début* in public on that occasion."

"Then will you allow me the pleasure of

being your first partner on that eventful night, unless you have already promised that favour to another?"

"Indeed, William, I shall not only be delighted, but shall feel less nervous, in having the support of an old friend on my first introduction to the *beau monde*."

"Thank you, dear Blanche," he replied, with his accustomed warmth; "and may you never find a friend less staunch and true than William Beauchamp."

"I neither wish nor expect to find another friend like you—but now I see Constance and Charles are halting for us."

"Well, Beauchamp," he exclaimed, as they rode up, "we must now change partners, as Constance wishes to return; but mind you both ride over, and repay our visit the day after to-morrow."

"I can't promise that exactly," was Beauchamp's answer, in a very grave tone.

"Oh, indeed! then Constance must ride by herself, I suppose," retorted Malcolm, angrily,

unless you think she ought not to have promised me to come at all?"

"No, Malcolm, I shall certainly accompany her, if that is so."

"And be in a better humour next time we meet," continued Malcolm; "but now, come, shake hands, old fellow, I can't afford to quarrel with you."

The friendly parting was exchanged on all sides, when Malcolm and Blanche turned their horses' heads,—the former suddenly exclaiming, "What can be the matter with Will Beauchamp, Blanche? I never saw such an alteration in any man since we last met; he looks as if he had been crossed in love—what can be the matter with him?"

"I really cannot tell, Charles."

"Do you think he is in love, Blanche?" he again asked.

"How should I know, Charles?" she answered, while the crimson mounted to her very temples.

"You do know something more than you

choose to tell me, dear Blanche," as he looked enquiringly into her face, which she endeavoured to turn away to conceal her confusion. "Only tell me one thing, my dearest girl," continued Malcolm, as he placed his hand affectionately on hers, "by our friendship and cousinly affection for each other, by my brotherly love for you, tell me, dear Blanche, in confidence, as your own dear brother, can you—do you love Will Beauchamp?" There was no reply.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated Malcolm, fervently, "I am now the happiest man in existence. Will Beauchamp's conduct is explained; he loves, as he ever must, deeply and unalterably, where his affections have been once bestowed; but, poor fellow! he thinks he loves hopelessly; he is too unpretending and modest to believe that the rich heiress, Miss Douglas, will ever condescend to accept him as a lover; yes, dear Blanche, this must be the real state of the case. I have known Beauchamp from a boy; he is high-spirited, of sound principles, honest and open as the day, and generous, even to a fault;

yet withal as proud as Lucifer, where his conduct may be questioned as equivocal; and here it is—here's the rub, my dear Blanche—he dreads to be called a fortune-hunter—although ever so attached to you."

At this moment they were interrupted by Mark Rosier jumping over a stile into the road, close to Lord Malcolm.

"Ah, Mark," said his Lordship, "how fares it with you since we last met?"

"It would have fared badly enough, my Lord, but for the young squire, who saved my poor old father and mother from the workhouse."

"Indeed, Mark," said Lord Malcolm, seriously, "how could this happen?"

"Lord Mervyn there turned us all out into the road, and seized everything we had, even to the bed to lie upon, and all on account of the game, which has been our ruin; but the young squire stood our friend, and has given us a farm from Lady-day next, rent free, stock and all, until we can get round again. God bless him

for it, and all belonging to him!" ended Mark, as he wiped a stray tear from his cheek.

"Here, then, Mark," said his Lordship, putting a five-pound note into his hand, "give that to your father from me, to keep a merry Christmas;" and, touching his horse with the whip, he and Blanche cantered off.

"There, Blanche," he said, when they had left Mark behind, "that act at once explains the character of William Beauchamp; and now I expect a lecture from Mrs. Harcourt for keeping you out late," as they entered the lodge gates.

CHAPTER XI.

During the absence of Lord Malcolm and her niece, Mrs. Harcourt had been discussing his lordship rather more pertinently than he surmised; in short, she had insisted on Mr. Harcourt enquiring what his real intentions were towards his cousin. "It is really high time to know whether Malcolm seriously thinks of marrying Blanche, or not," she remarked to her husband, "as it is very evident Lord Vancourt is very much taken with her; and in case of his proposing, we should scarcely know what answer to give him."

"Very well, my dear, I will take an opportunity of sounding Malcolm, the first time we are alone, although I am inclined to think, from my own observation, theirs may be only cousinly affection; but as the family from the castle dines here to-morrow, I will ascertain that point before their arrival, and let you know."

Accordingly, the next morning, after breakfast, when they were alone, Mr. Harcourt led to the point by asking some questions relative to Blanche's property in Scotland.

"It is in a very flourishing condition," replied Lord Malcolm; "and the tenants are improving their farms by draining, which will increase their own returns, as well as improve the value of the estate."

"Is there any prospect," inquired Mr. Harcourt, jocosely, "of the two properties being united under one head?"

"One manager, do you mean?"

"Yes, Charles, exactly so—in the person of Lord Malcolm," replied Mr. Harcourt, laughing.

"That," replied Lord Malcolm, gravely, "I

fear, never can be, as Blanche and myself regard each other as cousins only; and, to confess the truth, my affections have been long engaged elsewhere, although I shall ever love her as a dear sister."

"I am sorry to hear this confession, Charles, as Blanche's father and your own always expressed a strong desire that their children might some day be united."

At this moment Blanche entered the room, prepared for a walk.

"I fear," she said, "I am interrupting you and Mr. Harcourt."

"Oh, no," replied Lord Malcolm; "I am quite ready to attend you, dear Blanche."

When they had left the house, Malcolm said, "It is just what I expected from old Harcourt's serious looks at breakfast. He has been asking me, whether you were likely to become Lady Malcolm? and of course I told him we loved each other as cousins only; but there is more manœuvring in this than you suspect, my fair cousin. What should have induced old Har-

court to broach this subject so hastily and, I think, indelicately, when I had been only three days in his house? The answer to me is plain enough. That ill-conditioned Mervyn, with his chum Vancourt, dines here to-day, and Harcourt wished to ascertain my sentiments, in case my Lord Mervyn should make any allusion to his friend coming forward for the heiress—that's the secret, my dear girl. And, were it not for your sake, I feel so indignant at Harcourt's treatment, that I would leave his roof this very day."

"Oh, pray, Charles, don't think of doing that."

"No, Blanche, I certainly will not for the next month, at least, although I know now he would be rejoiced to get rid of me; but nothing shall induce me, my dear girl, to leave you to be tormented by these plotters; and Harcourt shall rue the day he treated me with so little ceremony; but for your sake, as I said before, I will smother my resentment, and pay him off in his own false coin."

The same afternoon, Beauchamp and his sister rode over to return Lord Malcolm and Blanche's

visit; and, after sitting some time with the ladies, the two friends sauntered out, at Malcolm's request, to see a new horse he had lately purchased. From the stables they took a stroll through the grounds, when Lord Malcolm told Beauchamp what had passed between himself and Mr. Harcourt, and his discovery of Blanche's love for him. And now, my dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart; and it has made me one of the happiest of men, to know that Blanche has bestowed her affections on him, whom I would have selected from all the world to be her husband."

"But, my dear Malcolm," Beauchamp was beginning, when he was cut short by his friend.

"Not another word, Beauchamp. I know you and Blanche thoroughly, and your deep strong feelings; you are both alike. Therefore, I insist on your proposing to her, allowing a little scope for your romantic ideas of giving her a few months for consideration; but if at the end of that time you don't marry her, not supposing an impossibility, that *she* will ever change,

though *you* may, I give you fair notice, old fellow, that I will call you out, and shoot you too, if I can, for breaking my dear cousin's heart. That is the result of my cogitations on this subject, Will Beauchamp, since we last parted at Bampton; and this is my advice, which, for both our happiness, I trust and believe you will adopt. Now let us return to the ladies, or old Harcourt will think we are plotting some mischief; but had I no other reason for wishing you to marry her, Blanche Douglas shall never be sold, like a sheep in the shambles, to the highest bidder, by that worldly-minded pair, under whose roof she has the misfortune to be living. Lucky, indeed, is it that I happened to arrive just at this critical moment, when poor Blanche's happiness might have been wrecked for ever; withal, she is but a timid child, and requires a steady friend and strong arm to protect her, such as she ought to find in Will Beauchamp."

"That she shall never want, whilst I live," he replied.

"Thank you, Beauchamp, you now speak like yourself, manly and straightforward, but no more at present, walls have ears—and laurels too," as they approached the house.

A more heterogeneous party never met together than that selected by the Harcourts to grace their dinner-table that evening. Sir Lionel Markham differed on every subject with Lord Mervyn. Mr. Compton was decidedly as antagonistic to him in politics, and hated by his lordship for showing twice the number of pheasants, with plenty of foxes also, and for being most popular in the county. Sir Lucius Gwynne and Mr. Vernon, whose dislike to each other was well known, and aunt Gordon, who (from sundry hints given her by Bob Conyers) felt disposed to quarrel with the whole castle party at first starting.

The only person who laboured assiduously, though hopelessly, to infuse some little harmony into this ill-assorted company, was Selina Markham, who sat next to Lord Malcolm. Lord Vancourt was endeavouring to engross atten-

tion by a description of his travels in Egypt and the Holy Land, and had been giving an account of the Pyramids, when Lord Malcolm, turning to Selina, said, "Ah! those pyramids remind me of the fate of a travelling companion who was standing with me on the top of one, when, being seized with sudden giddiness, he fell, and rolled from step to step, until he was dashed to pieces."

"How very shocking!" exclaimed Selina; "what could you do?"

"Nothing; he was gone in a moment, before I missed him from my side, and feeling myself turning sick and giddy also, as I looked below, I threw myself down on my face to prevent my sharing his untimely and wretched fate."

Lord Vancourt was silent whilst Malcolm related this accident, and did not afterwards deem it expedient to make many more allusions to his own adventures, finding another had been going over the same ground, who might probably catch him tripping.

All felt relieved when the ladies rose from the table to leave the dining-room, but little more advancement towards conviviality followed after their departure among the gentlemen, who seemed resolved to keep at a respectful distance from each other.

Lord Vancourt made two or three unsuccessful attempts to draw Malcolm into conversation, but his almost monosyllabic answers deterred him from indulging further hopes of being on good terms with his lordship, which he was most anxious to be, as living under the same roof with Miss Douglas, his friend Vernon having assured him there was no truth in the report that he was engaged to, or ever likely to marry, his cousin.

Sir Lionel and Mr. Compton, sitting together, were the only two who had any community of feelings or ideas, and even they were delighted when coffee was introduced, and a move made to join the ladies. Lord Vancourt was resolved, if possible, that evening, to find out how the case really stood between Lord Malcolm and

the heiress; for which purpose, on entering the drawing-room, he attached himself to Mrs. Harcourt, and soon after, observing Blanche in low and earnest conversation with her cousin, apart from the company, he remarked upon their being so much interested in each other's society, and said in a low tone, "The report of their engagement seems fully confirmed, Mrs. Harcourt."

"There is no engagement between them, my lord," replied that lady, "although both Mr. Harcourt and myself have long indulged such hopes, from their estates in Scotland joining each other, and also because we have the greatest regard for Lord Malcolm."

"I should judge from appearances," said Lord Vancourt, "that they were most unquestionably attached to each other."

"Merely cousinly affection," was the answer, "as Malcolm has expressed himself so unequivocally on the subject, that it admits of no doubt."

A triumphant smile played for a moment over the features of Lord Vancourt at this an-

nouncement, but he immediately turned the conversation into another channel. Malcolm maintained his position near Blanche the whole evening, accompanying her to the piano (when requested by Mrs. Harcourt to sing), and Lord Vancourt, perceiving his intention to prevent his advances that night, prudently gave way, and consoled himself with Mrs. Harcourt's society, in whose good opinion he had already made rapid progress.

The common topic of conversation was the annual ball which was to take place at Cherrington on the thirty-first of the month, now quickly approaching.

"I shall certainly attend that ball," said Mrs. Gordon, who had now joined Blanche and Malcolm, "to witness your introduction to the world, my dear girl, and you will find me always ready to act as your chaperon, as Mrs. Harcourt, I dare say, will be engaged with her numerous friends."

"I am so happy to hear you will be there, dear aunt," replied Blanche, "as your presence

will give me confidence on this trying occasion."

"Not that you will see much more of your aunt," said Malcolm, laughing, "than if she were at the Priory; for, rest assured, your numerous admirers will engage the heiress for every dance."

"She shall not dance more than she likes," replied Mrs. Gordon, "and, when fatigued, she will find a seat by my side."

"By the bye, Blanche," said Malcolm, "I must claim the privilege of trotting out my fair cousin on that auspicious occasion, by dancing the first dance with her, as in duty bound."

Blanche blushed deeply, and not replying, her cousin said, "Then you decline my handsome offer, eh, Blanche?"

"Mr. Beauchamp asked me the other day for the first, but I shall be most happy to dance with you the second."

"Well, dear girl, that will do equally well, and Constance shall be my first partner, so that point is settled before-hand, and you shall be

our *vis-à-vis* with Will Beauchamp—there, aunt, that will do nicely, and of course all eyes will be directed towards the two handsomest couples in the room. Don't you think, aunt, I am an uncommonly smart good-looking fellow, just as described in the old ballad?—

"He's as tall and as straight as a poplar tree,
And his cheeks are as red as the rose;
And he looks like a Squire of high degree,
When dressed in his Sunday's clothes!"

"My dear Charles," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "how can you quote such trash?—you are a very boy still."

"Yes, aunty, dear, and I hope to continue so for some few years to come—until arrived at years of discretion, when I suppose I shall exclaim,—

"Life's a farce, and all things show it,
I *thought* so once, but now I know it."

Well, thank goodness, the castle party are on the wing, and I wish them joy of their drive home, with that vicious old Mervyn boxed up with them, who is like a mad dog when things

don't suit him, snapping at every one in his way; that poor girl of his must lead a happy life with such parents."

"Hush, Charles, they are coming towards us."

"To shake hands with Blanche, I suppose," whispered Malcolm, "and try to get her over to the castle again."

Lady Mervyn, who was leaning on Lord Vancourt's arm, extended her hand most graciously to Blanche, who rose as they approached, and his lordship was about to make her a similar offer of friendly greeting, which with a curtsey she declined, and resumed her seat, soon after which all the other guests took leave.

A frost now set in, which put a stop to hunting, and Lord Malcolm, as was natural to suppose, rode over frequently to Bampton, sometimes taking Blanche with him. On their return one afternoon, when Blanche had left the room, Mrs. Harcourt expressed her disapprobation of her niece accompanying him so often to Bampton.

"On what account, Mrs. Harcourt, do you object to her visiting there? Constance and Blanche have always been like sisters since childhood."

"They are no longer children; and I wish my niece to make some higher acquaintances now, with persons moving in that sphere to which I hope to see her soon elevated."

"Oh, indeed, that is your reason, is it, Mrs. Harcourt?—Then allow me to observe, that I do not think Blanche Douglas will be ever in such a position as to feel degraded by or ashamed of the society of Lady Malcolm."

"I do not understand you, Charles."

"Very likely; but when I state my hopes that Constance Beauchamp will, ere long, become my wife, my meaning is explicit enough."

"Are you really serious, Lord Malcolm?"

"Never more so. Mr. Beauchamp, after a good deal of opposition, gave his consent to our marriage, but only on the condition that we spend half the year at Bampton during his life."

"In place of giving his daughter any for-

tune, I suppose," replied Mrs. Harcourt, with a sneer.

"No, not exactly that, either, my dear madam, as, the day I marry his daughter, he transfers into my name thirty thousand pounds, which he showed, by his banker's books, are now in the funds."

"Really, Malcolm, I did not think Mr. Beauchamp had any money at all there, as people say he is very poor."

"People say what they wish others to believe, out of spite, envy, or malice," replied Malcolm; "but as *I* am satisfied, that is quite sufficient."

"Oh, of course," rejoined Mrs. Harcourt; "but since *I* do not intend *Blanche* to marry a *Beauchamp*, I shall be obliged by your not taking her to Bampton again."

"William Beauchamp," said Malcolm, "is of as high and good connections, and of a prouder spirit than yourself, and you may rest assured will never obtrude himself into any family, where he does not meet a welcome recep-

tion;" with which he rose, and left the room.

Lord Vancourt had called twice whilst Blanche was out riding with her cousin, which annoyed Mrs. Harcourt, and she resolved therefore for the future to keep her more at home, in the hope of his Lordship proposing, as both Mr. Harcourt and herself were so pleased with him, and assured by Lord Mervyn of his large fortune also, that they had made up their minds to accept his proposal for their niece; and Mrs. Harcourt, dreading lest Malcolm might influence his cousin in favour of Beauchamp, thought the sooner the thing could be settled the better.

The next day, when Malcolm was out shooting, Lord Vancourt, under the pretence of inviting him to a shooting-party at the Castle (which he knew very well he would not accept), called again at Throseby, and found the ladies at home; and after sitting some time, Mrs. Harcourt rose, under the excuse of having mislaid her handkerchief, leaving poor Blanche alone with her unwelcome admirer.

Her embarrassment and varying colour having impressed his Lordship with the belief of his having inspired her with an interest in his favour, he began at first speaking of the ball, to lead her on, expressing a hope that she would honour him with her hand in the first dance.

"For that I am engaged," she replied.

"The second, then, Miss Douglas?" The same answer, at which my lord bit his lip, and fire flashed from his dark, piercing eye, which did not escape Blanche's notice. "May I plead, then, for the next, Miss Douglas? in which I hope for better success."

"I do not recollect that I am engaged for that, and shall be happy to dance with you, provided it is a quadrille, as I do not waltz."

"I must of course submit to your own terms," remarked his lordship; "and among so many advocates for your hand, I consider myself highly honoured by your accepting me for your partner;" and he was proceeding in a strain of flattery and adulation, every moment becoming more irksome to poor Blanche, when Lord

Malcolm entered the room, and she instantly hurried upstairs. To account for his lordship's unexpected entrance, we must explain, that having gone out shooting that morning, and posted himself on the outside of a small gorse covert on the hill above the house, his attention was attracted by a horse galloping on the hard gravel road, and looking down, he beheld Lord Vancourt rapidly riding up to the door. Telling the keeper to go on beating until his return, he ran down the hill, and arrived in time to prevent the *éclaircissement* that Lord Vancourt purposed making to his cousin. His annoyance at finding Blanche had been left alone by Mrs. Harcourt did not tend to improve his ill-humour; and having politely declined Lord Mervyn's invitation, Lord Vancourt rose and left the room, his horse and groom being at the door.

The evening of the ball had now arrived, and about ten o'clock the heiress made her first appearance in public, leaning on Mrs. Harcourt's arm, who stalked majestically into the

ball-room with the air of the highest personage in the land. Blanche was dressed in white, with an elegance and simplicity which did justice to her beauty as well as her taste; and with her graceful figure and sweet, artless expression of countenance, looked the personification of loveliness. William Beauchamp, having purposely arrived early, was waiting with Constance near the door, and accosted them on their entrance with his usual frankness of manner; and whilst his sister was speaking to Mrs. Harcourt, re-engaged Blanche for the first dance.

Mrs. Harcourt, although overhearing her niece's assent to Beauchamp's request, said she wished to take a survey of the company before dancing commenced, (for the purpose, secretly, of parading her charge, and preventing, if possible, her accepting Beauchamp's arm for the first quadrille); and with this view, kept her talking to some acquaintances at the top of the room until the sets were formed, notwithstanding Beauchamp's hints that they must now take their places, to which Mrs. Harcourt turned a deaf ear, and per-

sisted in retaining a tight hold of her niece's arm.

"Aunt Harcourt," whispered the poor girl, timidly, "I am engaged to Mr. Beauchamp for the first dance, and he is waiting."

"Oh, it does not signify, my dear; you can dance the second with him, as I wish to introduce you to Lord and Lady Seaton, who, I see, have just arrived."

"But I am engaged to Charles for the second," whispered Blanche.

"Well, my dear, it cannot be helped, as I really must present you to some of my particular friends first; there will be ample time for dancing afterwards."

Beauchamp, however, would not be thrown off by these manœuvres, and doggedly following Mrs. Harcourt, that lady, now thinking she had deprived him of his dance, at last resigned her niece's arm. As Beauchamp walked away with her, he said rather indignantly—

"Mrs. Harcourt has purposely prevented me enjoying this dance with you, dear Blanche. I

will not be disappointed, however, in the next; we are too late now to join in this set, which, if I could, I would not."

"But I have promised Charles the second."

"Oh, never mind, he will give that to me, when he hears how badly I have been treated,—that is, unless you would prefer dancing with him."

"Oh, no," she replied, "if Charles will not be offended."

"Now then, Blanche, I see aunt Gordon looking towards us. We must go and speak to her."

Her surprise at seeing Blanche walking about, instead of dancing, was increased to indignation when told by Beauchamp of Mrs. Harcourt's behaviour.

"Sit down here, my love, and I will be your chaperon for the rest of the evening."

"I must leave her a moment with you, dear aunt," said Beauchamp, "whilst I speak a few words with Malcolm;" after which, he immediately returned, and sat down by Blanche, tell-

ing her Malcolm had kindly waived his claim to her hand for the next dance. They were joined by Constance and her partner soon after, when Malcolm said she must now dance the third with him.

"I am sorry to say, Charles, I am engaged for that to Lord Vancourt."

"Oh, indeed!" said Malcolm, whilst his brow contracted with anger; "then the fourth, Blanche?"

"Yes, Charles, with great pleasure."

"How provoking," said Malcolm to Constance, "that we cannot have a dance together with Blanche and Beauchamp; but I won't be done in this manner, so you must stand up with me again, Constance, as their *vis-à-vis*."

"Oh," said Constance, laughing, "it is not etiquette, Charles, to dance two quadrilles in succession, with the same person."

"Nonsense about etiquette, Constance! will you refuse me for form's sake?"

"Certainly not, if you particularly wish it."

"That I do, dear girl, and mind we all four

join again in the last dance. Do you agree to this, Blanche?" he enquired.

"If Mrs. Harcourt will not be angry at my dancing twice with William."

"You are no longer a child," replied Malcolm, "to be tied to Mrs. Harcourt's apron-strings, and have a right now to please yourself; but what says aunt Gordon, whose ideas on such subjects are quite as correct as Mrs. Harcourt's?"

"I see no impropriety in such an arrangement, if Blanche has no other objection."

"None whatever, dear aunt; and I shall be delighted to join Charles and Constance in the last dance of the evening."

"Thank you, dear Blanche," whispered Beauchamp, "and now we must take our places."

Many scrutinizing and invidious glances were directed towards the heiress and her partner as they glided gracefully through the figure, too much pleased in each other's company to bestow a thought or care for the lookers-on. Lord

Vancourt remarked to Vernon—"You have underrated him."

"Not much, I think," was the reply.

"Decidedly, Vernon, he is very gentlemanly in manners, good-looking, and altogether the sort of man any young girl would fall desperately in love with; in short, I must be quick, and even now, from what I see, my impression is that I am too late in the field."

"You have two to one on your side, my Lord, and Beauchamp has no more chance than I have."

"He has a bold, determined look," replied Vancourt, "just that of a man who will not stick at trflies when he has a point to gain."

"That girl won't run away with any man," said Vernon, "although she may be carried away. Do you take, my Lord? and with the consent of her guardian, which is a sure thing, supposing the young lady rather coy to yourself, I should not hesitate one moment."

"That is a very serious affair, Vernon."

"Not in your case, my Lord. Make your

proposal first to her guardian — ifaccepted, you are all right; and I am quite sure they will both press your offer upon their ward, for fear of Beauchamp. This, of course, you will find out from what Harcourt says in reply to your proposal; and if she refuses you can fairly plead their consent, and your deep, passionate, uncontrollable love for the young lady, which induced you to have recourse to a little stratagem. That's all, my Lord, and you will never hear another word on the subject after the heiress has become Lady Vancourt. Why, in Scotland, the thing is settled in five minutes by the blacksmith — bribe him well, and he will get two other persons to swear they heard her say she would take you for her husband, and of course you will say you take her for your wife, aud there's an end of the business. You will then be man and wife, and if she should run away from you afterwards (which I don't think likely), her money is safe at any rate."

"Really, Vernon, you are up to a thing or two, and argue very plausibly; but I must consider

well before I undertake such a project, although it appears feasible enough. Now the quadrille's over, I shall claim her hand, and try what impression I can make first."

This conversation had been carried on in a low tone by Lord Vancourt and Vernon, who were standing apart near a window; and their attention was so much engrossed by watching the heiress and Beauchamp dancing, that they did not perceive Bob Conyers, who sat ensconced in a seat behind the window-curtains, and who therefore heard sufficient to apprise him of their intentions.

"Hah! hah!" thought Bob, "a rascally trick, my Lord and Mr. Vernon, between you! but I'll put Beauchamp and Malcolm up to the dodge, and aunt Gordon too, before this time to-morrow night."

As Beauchamp, after the quadrille, was making his way with Blanche to where Mrs. Gordon was sitting, Lord Vancourt presented himself before her, saying she had promised him the honour of her hand for the next dance, and

offering his arm, which Blanche, not knowing the rules on such occasions, was hesitating whether to accept or not, when Beauchamp said quickly to her—"I must consign you first to your aunt, as a waltz succeeds this quadrille in which you do not join."

"I shall not brook your interference, sir," said Vancourt, haughtily.

"Nor I yours, Lord Vancourt," retorted Beauchamp, as drawing himself up he resolutely passed on.

"William," said Blanche, earnestly looking in his face, and pressing her hand upon his arm, "I hope you will not quarrel with Lord Vancourt."

"No, dear Blanche, if possible to avoid it; but you shall not be imposed upon or insulted by any human being."

"Oh, he did not intend that, I hope," said Blanche.

"There was an impertinence in his manner, by stopping you when leaning on my arm, and knowing well he had no right then to interrupt

us or claim your hand, which I could not submit to."

"But, William, promise me it shall go no further—promise me not to quarrel with him—for my sake, William, will you do this?" she enquired, beseechingly, as he seemed to hesitate.

"Yes, dearest Blanche (in a low tone), for your dear sake will I do anything."

"Thank you," she replied, with one of her sweet smiles, "and remember, if you forget your promise, you will make me wretched," as she relinquished his arm, and sat down by her aunt.

"Why, Beauchamp," said Lord Malcolm, who had been following close behind him, "that hot-headed Irish lord seemed disposed to pick a quarrel with you, did he not?"

"I rather suspected something of the kind from Vernon's tutoring, as I saw those worthies in deep consultation together whilst we were dancing, and casting ominous looks towards me; and but for dear Blanche, I would have knocked that insolent lord across the room for daring to stand in her way."

"Egad, I believe you, Beauchamp," replied Malcolm; "but it won't do to talk of these things now."

"No, no, it is all over and past, and, as I have promised Mrs. Gordon never to fight a duel, we must say no more about it."

"William," said Mrs. Gordon, "you know your promise, and the penalty for breaking it?"

"Indeed I do, dear aunt, which I will never incur; and therefore, Malcolm," said Beauchamp, laughing, "I am restricted to a game of fives or cudgels, with the choice of which I will favour any man, who purposely insults me."

"And I for one," added Malcolm, jocosely, "would not be in the skin of your opponent, in a ten foot ring, for a hundred pounds, although we Scots are known to be unco' fond of the siller."

"What does a game of fives mean, William?" inquired Blanche.

"This," said Beauchamp, good-humouredly, placing his clenched hand in hers; "four fingers and a thumb make a bunch of five or a fist,

which is man's natural weapon of defence; but don't be alarmed, dear Blanche," he said, lowering his voice. "*I* will promise not to *fight*, if *you* will promise not to *flirt* with him, or let him make love to you."

"That he shall not do, if I can prevent it, William, rest assured."

Lord Vancourt now advanced, with a very profound bow, and Blanche rose reluctantly to take his arm, casting a lingering look behind, (as she was led away), implying, "don't you pity me?" Beauchamp felt that appeal, and instantly followed her, with Bob Conyers, who just then came up, and both stood behind her, whilst she was dancing with Lord Vancourt; and when disengaged occasionally in the dance, Beauchamp spoke a few words of encouragement.

Lord Vancourt was nettled at this interference, and bestowed a look full of malignity on Beauchamp, who returned his glance with a steady, unflinching gaze, which somewhat disconcerting his Lordship, prevented an effusion of those soft

speeches he had proposed for the occasion. To add more to his discomfort, also, Captain Melville now joined Conyers, and kept his eye steadily fixed on his Lordship's movements. Of all in that room Lord Vancourt dreaded Melville, who was acquainted with his *peccadilloes*, and having heard him engage Miss Douglas for the next dance, feared he would enlighten her on his real position, so that he felt so ill at ease as to prove anything but agreeable to his fair partner.

The dance being concluded, Vancourt immediately led her to Mrs. Harcourt, where he thought Beauchamp or Conyers could not follow; and being offered a seat by that Lady, he sat down by Blanche, hoping to prevent her dancing with Melville.

But the Captain, guessing his purpose, immediately approached, notwithstanding my lord's forbidding aspect, and offered his arm, which, glad to escape from her tormentor, she readily accepted.

On walking away, Melville asked Blanche if

she had known Lord Vancourt long. "No," was the reply; "I was introduced to him a short time since only, at Lord Mervyn's, when you dined there."

"What do you think of him?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Very agreeable and entertaining," was the reply.

"Yes, all that, Miss Douglas, a finished courtier. But he is well known as the worst-tempered man, and the greatest rake about town."

"Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt have a very high opinion of him," replied Blanche.

"Because they know nothing of his real disposition or character; but when I tell you, Miss Douglas, that I declined his Lordship's introduction to my own sister, you may suppose I had some good reason for this refusal. More than that, it is unnecessary for me to add."

Melville then changed the subject; and, being witty, pleasing, and friendly in his address, Blanche soon felt more at ease with him than

with any stranger she had yet been introduced to. Her natural reserve gradually wore off; and she looked so pleased and happy from the music and excitement of dancing, that Melville presumed on her evident favourable feeling towards himself to ask for a second dance."

"That, I fear, is impossible, Captain Melville, as I am already engaged to more partners than, I believe, there will be dances."

"I feared as much," he replied; "but am not the least surprised to find such is the case, although I must express my great disappointment; and, with many thanks for the most delightful dance it has ever been my good fortune to enjoy, I must now most reluctantly resign you to Mrs. Harcourt again."

"Oh no," she said, "not to her. My aunt Gordon is expecting me on the other side of the room."

"Will you be kind enough to introduce me to her?" he asked.

"With pleasure," replied Blanche, "for I am sure you will like her."

The introduction being made, Melville remained talking to Mrs. Gordon until Markham approached to claim Miss Douglas, to whom he was engaged. Lord Vancourt had been watching Blanche's pleased expression of countenance when dancing with Captain Melville, and wreaked his vengeance by base insinuations against his character, which Mrs. Harcourt readily believed, and the more so, because he was represented as possessing nothing in the world but his pay. But Vancourt determined in his own mind that moments were now of precious importance to himself; and that he must win as much favour as possible with Mrs. Harcourt, who was his chief supporter; and he played his part accordingly, being with her the greatest part of the evening, handing her into the supper-room, and paying her every possible attention, which gratified her vanity to the greatest possible degree.

William Beauchamp, being a great favourite with the young ladies, contrived to join in almost every set with his beloved Blanche, and sat next

to her and Mrs. Gordon at the supper-table, with Lord Malcolm and Constance opposite; so that they thoroughly enjoyed this little respite from their almost incessant exertions.

"Blanche," said Malcolm, "you look fagged and tired to death already; and I hope Aunt Gordon will not allow you to dance any more to-night."

"Oh, nonsense, Charles, I shall be as fresh as ever after supper; and I have enjoyed this ball so much."

"Very well, child, as you please; but mind, Beauchamp, you take care of her, and give her half-a-bottle of champagne, for she looks like a ghost."

No hint of this sort was necessary, and Beauchamp had the pleasure of seeing the roses return to her cheeks on again entering the ball-room, where they were met by Lord Vancourt and Mrs. Harcourt, who expressed herself much displeased with her niece for having deserted her protection that evening. Blanche quietly replied that she had been sitting with her aunt

Gordon during the intervals between the dances.

"Very well, my dear, then I expect you will remain with me now until the ball is over;" and offering her arm, Blanche was obliged to accept it. Lord Vancourt then begged for another dance, to which Blanche replied that she was engaged to Major Hammond, a friend of Captain Melville's. "I don't know him," observed Mrs. Harcourt, "and as he is not here, now the sets are formed, of course you cannot refuse Lord Vancourt;" who immediately offered his arm, and walked off with her.

Her dancing twice with him did not fail to elicit the usual comments, which Mrs. Harcourt was delighted to hear; and Blanche's timid looks and heightened colour, when addressed by his lordship, led many to draw inferences, the reverse of true, that Lord Vancourt was the favoured man; and sure, with his title and handsome person, to carry off the heiress.

"Ah," said Selina Markham, who was dancing with Beauchamp in the same set, "it is

really a reflection upon all the young men in the county, to allow that whiskerando Lord to pounce down, like a great over-grown kite amongst a timid flock of pigeons, and carry off our young heiress! What are they all thinking of? Even my brother Ned, the Lifeguardsman, seems to quail beneath his look, and keeps saying 'Eh, demmit, but what can a man do?' 'Do,' I said, 'why, demmit, Ned, pick a quarrel and shoot the fellow; or lend me the uniform, and I will do it for you.' Poor dear Blanche, with those odious Harcourts, she will be sacrificed, poor child, to that fierce-looking, rat-eyed Bonassus."

"Hush, Selina," said Beauchamp, "he will overhear you."

"So much the better," replied the wayward, high-spirited girl, "I hate him equally with Vernon, who is his great ally."

"Who is that forward, pert, young lady dancing with Mr. Beauchamp?" enquired Lord Vancourt, who had overheard some of her remarks.

"Miss Markham," replied Blanche.

"Who is that hook-nosed, monkey legged fellow dancing with Miss Douglas?" asked Selina, in return, loud enough for him to hear.

"Lord Vancourt," whispered Beauchamp. "But pray, Selina, do not be so loud in your remarks."

"Eh! Aw! Lord *Vain-court*, think he's well named, as Ned says, he has been paying court to every young heiress that has come out in town for the last five seasons, and cannot succeed; so now he has come down to try the provinces! eh! Pon honour, very condescending indeed! with my Lord Mervyn for his bear-leader!"

"Really, Selina, if you run on in this strain, I must leave you to finish the dance by yourself."

"Very well, Will Beauchamp, a good riddance of bad company; for, what with Sawnies and Spoonies, the young ladies in this neighbourhood have a delightful choice of husbands!"

" In which class, pray, have I the honour of being included?"

" In the first," replied Selina; " you are a decided Sawney, Will Beauchamp, and a Spooney too," she whispered, " if you allow that fellow to carry off Blanche."

" Well, Selina, don't be too sevre upon a quiet, inoffensive young man, like myself," said Beauchamp, laughing.

" You are an arrant donkey, Will, I am sorry to say; I have no patience with you; you can look hard enough at your fences, but dare not look a pretty girl in the face."

" Well, Selina, as that is my failing, I must put on a little more brass for the future; and now with many thanks for your hint, I must make my bow to my fair lecturer."

The more pleasantly time passes, the more quickly it fleets away; and the ball was now brought to a close by the usual country dance, in which, as agreed upon, Lord Malcolm, Constance Beauchamp, and Blanche joined; after

which, notwithstanding a little impatience exhibited by Mrs. Harcourt, our young fox-hunter persisted in cloaking and handing his fair partner to the carriage.

CHAPTER XII.

The following morning, Lords Mervyn and Vancourt, with Vernon, held a consultation on the state of affairs; and it was determined that Vancourt should write a proposal to Mr. Harcourt, the next day, for his ward.

"I think it would be best to call at Throseby," observed Lord Vancourt.

"No," said Vernon, "that will not answer the same purpose as writing—*litera scripta manet.* Get Harcourt to give his consent on black and white, and then you are safe for any contingency."

" You are quite right, Vernon," said Lord Mervyn, " and a capital adviser in such matters."

Accordingly, the next day, about the hour of luncheon, a servant was sent over on horseback from the castle, with the proposal in due form, and worded after the most approved fashion, with the usual protestations of love and devotion to the young lady.

Mr. Harcourt was in the dining-room with Blanche, Mrs. Harcourt, and Malcolm, when the letter was delivered to him; and having glanced over the contents, he put it into his pocket.

" My Lord's servant is waiting for an answer, sir," said the footman.

" An answer shall be sent this afternoon," was the reply. No further comment was made on the contents of the letter until after luncheon, when Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt retired to their own private sitting-room to deliberate.

" I think, my dear," said the gentleman (after they had decided to accept his Lordship's offer), " you are the most proper person to speak to Blanche on this subject, and of course can

explain our wishes much better than I can, —pointing out the many advantages, in point of title and connection, and pressing Blanche not to refuse so flattering a proposal."

"Indeed," replied the lady, "I cannot think my niece will act so contrary to our advice and her own interests as to refuse Lord Vancourt."

No sooner had Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt left the dining-room than Blanche, with the foreboding of evil (the influence of which no mortal can either explain or escape) turning to her cousin said, "I wonder, Charles, what that letter from Lord Vancourt contains."

"A proposal for your hand, dear girl—that is my impression."

"Oh, Charles," exclaimed the poor girl, almost in tears, and turning deadly pale, "what can I say?"

"Say! my dear Blanche, what you think you ought to say."

"Oh, indeed, Charles! I never could accept such a man."

"Heaven forbid you should," returned Mal-

colm, "for, by all accounts, a worse character does not exist. Refuse him, my dear girl, point blank—no evasions or after-considerations —and don't listen a moment to Mrs. Harcourt's persuasions. You don't like him, and won't marry him; stick to that, and mind I will stick to you through thick and thin."

At this moment a servant entered, saying Mrs. Harcourt wished to see Miss Douglas in her morning-room.

"Very well," replied Malcolm, "she will be there directly. Now, Blanche," said he, pouring out a glass of wine, "drink that, my dear girl, to keep up your courage, and recollect I shall be listening to hear what you say—be firm and decided, and we will take a walk together afterwards."

Poor Blanche, dreading a lecture as well as a proposal, entered her aunt's room, trembling with apprehension, and being offered a chair, was obliged to listen to the contents of Lord Vancourt's letter, with many comments thereon from Mrs. Harcourt.

"And now, my dear child," continued her aunt, most affectionately, "you will, of course, not decline such an unexceptionable offer. Lord Vancourt is so handsome, so agreeable, and talented in addition to his rank, that you really ought to feel highly flattered by the preference he has shown you, independent of his professions of deep attachment to yourself, which I am sure, from his manner, he must feel."

"Indeed, aunt," replied Blanche, timidly, "I cannot accept him."

"Not accept him, Blanche! and why not?" she enquired, in well-feigned astonishment.

"Because I cannot love, or even respect him, aunt; his very looks frighten me."

"What nonsense, child! you are so timid; but all that will pass away when you have known him longer."

"I do not wish to marry yet, aunt, and never can accept Lord Vancourt;" and notwithstanding all her aunt's entreaties, remonstrances, and even menaces of her displeasure, Blanche, emboldened by a slight cough at the door,

adhered firmly to her text, and quietly, though positively, rejected his proposal; nor would she admit the hope of time (the last plank to a wrecked lover) effecting a more favourable change in his favour.

"I am really surprised at you," said Mrs. Harcourt at last, rising indignantly, "that, after all our kindness, you should show so little respect to our wishes." Blanche hastily rushed from the room, and in a moment afterwards found herself in her cousin's arms, who was waiting in the corridor.

"Now, Blanche, dear," he said, kissing her flushed cheek, "run up, like a good girl, and put on your bonnet; I shall wait in the hall."

"Oh, Charles, I feel so unhappy from having displeased aunt Harcourt that I shall remain in my room."

"You shall do no such thing, Blanche; and unless you join me in the hall within ten minutes, I will come up to your room and fetch you. I won't let you cry and fret about all this got-up humbug."

Blanche soon re-appeared, and the fresh air, with Malcolm's cheerful and cheering society, soon made her feel more composed.

"Stuff and nonsense about offending your aunt," exclaimed he. "So you are to marry to suit her convenience, are you? and swear to love and obey a man you don't care a rap about —more, positively dislike? By all that's sacred, would not such an act be absolute perjury? My dear Blanche, the very idea is horrible—positively revolting to any pure-minded woman; and if either your guardian or aunt venture on this subject with me, they shall have a lecture they will not very easily forget."

"Oh, don't say anything about it to them, Charles."

"Not unless they begin, depend upon it; but now we will talk of something else, as I feel thoroughly disgusted with the whole affair."

Whilst the two cousins were enjoying their walk, Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt were concocting their reply to Lord Vancourt and verifying the old adage of "too many cooks spoiling the

broth;" for with the lady's interference and amendments, the meaning of the letter was so ambiguous, that it might be taken either as a refusal or acceptance of his lordship's proposals. The document, however, such as it was, was at length dispatched and received by Lord Vancourt, who was sitting over the fire with Lord Mervyn and Vernon in the library, previous to dressing for dinner.

His lordship hastily broke the seal and scanned rapidly the contents—he read them a second time more carefully—turned the letter over and over, and was commencing another perusal, when Lord Mervyn asked impatiently, "What is it, Vancourt, a refusal or acceptance?"

"'Pon my life, I can scarcely tell," replied Vancourt. "There," handing it across to him, "give me your opinion, for I cannot make head or tail of it."

Lord Mervyn was equally puzzled, and handed it in turn to Vernon, saying, "There, you are a diplomatist, Vernon, and may perhaps unravel the language of this mystical compound."

Vernon, knowing the character of the writers, rightly interpreted their meaning, and said, "Here have been two heads at work with this composition. Harcourt intended it as a refusal from Miss Douglas, but the lady, having set her mind on accepting Lord Vancourt, has endeavoured to nullify his intentions, and so far has succeeded that any man may fairly take it as an acceptance from her guardian, and in that light I should certainly recommend Lord Vancourt to consider it. The last sentence, 'That Lord Vancourt has both Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt's best wishes for his ultimate success in obtaining their niece's hand, and that no persuasions on their part *shall* be wanting to effect so desirable a consummation,' is the very admission we desired. My advice, therefore, is, that Lord Vancourt should ride over to-morrow, express his warm obligations to Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt for their friendly sentiments towards himself, and endeavour to obtain an interview with the young lady; and I doubt not, from her timidity and fear of her aunt's displeasure, such an answer

may be extorted from her own lips as to be construed into an acceptance, or, at least, so Lord Vancourt will interpret it, and then what is to follow will appear almost as a natural consequence, for on one point I am thoroughly satisfied, from what I overheard mentioned by several persons in the ball-room the other night, that Lord Vancourt has not a day to spare—in fact, Melville told Bob Conyers that he was going to town the next day on purpose to collect information about the Italian and a certain person's affairs, which he was determined to communicate to Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt without delay, for he swore Miss Douglas should never marry such an impostor—those were his words, my lord, although they must be very unpalatable for you to hear. The blacksmith, therefore, is your only chance. Independent of which, you are already blown upon by Markham, whose sister, Selina, spoke pretty plain, as she always does."

"I heard her," replied Vancourt, "and suspect, as you say, my chief dependence now is

on two pair of posters and my travelling-carriage."

"That is the thing, my lord—the only thing to be done under your circumstances; and having this letter in your possession from her guardian, you are as safe as the Bank of England."

The next morning, after breakfast, Mrs. Gordon drove over to see her niece, and finding her very low-spirited, inquired the cause, which poor Blanche readily confided to her kind-hearted aunt, when they were together in her own room.

"Ah, poor child! I feared Mrs. Harcourt would be worrying you to accept that bad man, for such a character Captain Melville gave Mr. Conyers of him, declaring he would go to London directly and get evidence to prove all he said; and now, my dear Blanche, you shall return with me to the Priory for a few days, to recruit your spirits and escape further importunities."

"Oh, dear aunt! I shall be so delighted if you will take me with you."

"That I certainly will, my love, so get Alice to pack up your things, whilst I go down stairs and speak to Mrs. Harcourt, for go with me you shall."

Any one of my readers who has witnessed the meeting of two strange cats, with arched backs and fire darting from their eye-balls, spitting and swearing as a preliminary to scratching and tearing the fleck out of each other's bodies, may form some idea of the rencontre between the two aunts, when brought into hostile collision about their niece.

"So, Mrs. Harcourt," exclaimed aunt Gordon, on entering the drawing-room, "you have been worrying poor Blanche to accept that good-for-nothing man, Lord Vancourt."

"Good-for-nothing man, Mrs. Gordon! what do you mean?"

"That he is a worthless, gambling, penniless fortune-hunter, and already married, or entangled with an Opera dancer. To encourage such a man for my niece is unpardonable, Mrs. Harcourt."

"It is unpardonable in you, Mrs. Gordon," retorted the other, "to utter such a false, scandalous libel against his lordship, who is a person of unblemished character, of well-known good fortune, and of the highest and most honourable feelings. But who is his base slanderer, Mrs. Gordon?—His name I have a right to know, as we have approved Lord Vancourt's proposals, allowing Blanche due time for consideration."

"My information is derived through Mr. Conyers from Captain Melville, who has known Lord Vancourt for some years, and he is now gone to London to obtain the necessary proof of what he has asserted, as Mr. Conyers questioned the truth of these reports. His last words to him were—'As you doubt my word, I engage to return at the end of a week, and prove Lord Vancourt an impostor, or forfeit my honour as a gentleman.' Having spoken this in a public ball-room, Captain Melville must (holding a commission in the army) maintain or retract his assertions; and, in the meantime,

under these unpleasant circumstances, Blanche will find it more comfortable at the Priory than here, where, of course (after your sanction to his addresses), Lord Vancourt will be calling again."

Mrs. Harcourt, feeling alarmed at these revelations, and thinking that perhaps she had been too precipitate in the affair, raised no further objections to Blanche's return with Mrs. Gordon, and within half an hour they were in her carriage on the road to the Priory, Lord Malcolm promising to ride over after luncheon and dine with them.

Malcolm had scarcely disappeared through the lower lodge gates of Throseby, before Lord Vancourt entered by the upper. He was rather more formally received by the lady of the mansion than he expected, which, notwithstanding all his complimentary speeches and expressions of deep obligation for Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt's most flattering approval of his proposals, did not wear away.

"May I hope," inquired his lordship, in the most deferential tone, "for a short interview

with Miss Douglas, as I have not had the opportunity of making my proposal to her in person ?"

" She left us this morning to remain with her aunt, Mrs. Gordon, for a week," was the reply.

Lord Vancourt bit his lip at this intelligence, and looked exceedingly mortified, which Mrs. Harcourt noticing, said—

" Your lordship must have gathered from Mr. Harcourt's letter, that we had failed to obtain the consent of Miss Douglas to receive your addresses."

" Indeed ! I did not so interpret its contents," replied Lord Vancourt, " but was induced to think a personal interview with your niece might have led to a better understanding between us, and a confirmation of my most sanguine hopes."

" At present," replied Mrs. Harcourt, " Miss Douglas would, I am quite sure, decline such an interview, although time may possibly effect some change in her sentiments."

" Am I to consider, then," inquired Lord Vancourt, "this as my final answer, that Miss Douglas positively declines my future addresses ?"

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Mrs. Harcourt (fearing she was now verging on the other extreme, and taking Mrs. Gordon's communications for granted), "we shall be most happy to receive you here as usual on my niece's return, although, from her natural shyness of character, too much precipitation on your lordship's part would produce the contrary effect to that which you have our best wishes to accomplish."

With many thanks for this friendly concession, Lord Vancourt politely took his leave, leaving Mrs. Harcourt in a most unenviable state of mind, doubting whether she had said too much or too little. On Mr. Harcourt's return, the occurrences of the day were duly retailed, and that worthy gentleman began to doubt his own want of proper precaution in not first investigating Lord Vancourt's affairs, merely relying on Lord Mervyn's representations.

"We have been too hasty, my dear," observed Mr. Harcourt; "and I now truly regret having penned that letter, chiefly at your dictation."

"Oh, it is of little consequence," returned his

spouse; "Blanche does not like him, and so ends the business, since with her fortune there will be no lack of suitors."

Poor Blanche, when safe at the Priory, felt like a bird escaped from its cage, and her happiness was increased by the arrival of Malcolm and Bob Conyers to dinner, the latter dropping in quite unexpectedly. Great indignation was expressed (when the servants withdrew) by Malcolm and Conyers, at the Harcourts' indelicate behaviour to Blanche, in which Aunt Gordon heartily concurred; and all three having declared their resolution to prevent a repetition of such improper influence being again exercised over her, the subject was discontinued, and the events at the ball substituted. Leaving this happy party by the fire-side, we must now look in at Marston Castle.

END OF VOL. I.

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